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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 190

ELEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 29 April 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Planning Legislation

1. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to review legislation relating to planning and development in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): The need for changes to planning legislation is kept under constant review. The Planning and Compensation Bill now before the House will introduce various alterations to make the planning system in England and Wales fairer and more efficient.

Mr. Smith: What does the Minister plan to do to stop the flagrant abuse of planning laws that has allowed the Vale of Glamorgan borough council to do a deal with local developers, which has resulted in the developers becoming millionaires overnight and in the people of Barry losing one of the last remaining open spaces in the town? Will the Minister consider calling in the plans for College fields in Barry? Will he introduce legislation to prevent councils from giving themselves planning permission when they either own land or have an unhealthy financial interest in it, to prevent that sort of thing from happening again?

Mr. Bennett: I do not want to comment on the allegations made by the hon. Gentleman. The request for a call-in is being considered and I hope to give a decision shortly.

Mr. Raffan: Is my hon. Friend aware that in his farewell speech to Delyn borough council planning committee, the highly respected chief planning officer Mr. Mike Smith warned the committee that increasingly it was acting against officers' recommendations, contrary to its own clearly laid down planning policies and contrary to the principles of equity and fairness? Does my hon. Friend share my concern about those serious allegiations and will he take them into consideration in his constant reviewing?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear me say that I have not come across the speech to which he referred. Local authorities, in response to the needs of local people, must consider carefully the way in which they deal with planning applications. I am sure that when the local electorate decides how to vote in this week's elections it will consider the council's record in the past four years.

Health Service

2. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairmen of health authorities in Wales to discuss the level of expenditure provision for the health service in Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I met health authority chairmen on 31 January and I hope to do so again in the near future.

Mr. Rogers: The Secretary of State is aware that both my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and I have been pressing him hard in recent years about the construction of the new East Glamorgan hospital. Can he confirm that he is going ahead with it and that we will have those new resources for the Rhondda and Taff-Ely area?

Mr. Hunt: I am happy to confirm that today I approved plans for two new district general hospitals to be built for

the national health service in Wales at a cost of more than £130 million. I have approved proposals by the Mid Glamorgan health authority to build a new hospital on land at Ynys-Y-Plwm near Llantrisant and by West Glamorgan health authority to build one at Baglan moors, Port Talbot.

Mr. Foot: When the right hon. Gentleman sees what an almighty botch his fellow Ministers are making of the national health service in England, will he work on the simple principle "Go thou and do otherwise"?

Mr. Hunt: Not at all. As Ministers responsible for health, we work closely together throughout the United Kingdom. However, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that I have done a small calculation. If the national health service in Wales was now spending the amount that it was spending when the Labour party was last in government, at 1992 prices, the total amount spent in Wales would be £1,104 million. That appears to be a reasonable sum, until it is compared with the amount that the Government are spending in the coming year, which is £1,719 million. I have to ask the Opposition where the £615 million cuts would have been imposed. How many hospitals would have been closed if the Opposition were still in office?

Mr. Gwilym Jones: At last Wednesday's meeting of the Welsh Select Committee, we took evidence from medical academics. The chief witness, a statistician, told us that it is not possible to construct a mathematical formula to use waiting lists meaningfully and that the only worthwhile statistic is the number of patients being treated in Wales each year. If we were to move to the spending levels practised by the Opposition would that not mean a cut in the 700,000 patients being treated each year in Wales?

Mr. Hunt: That is right. It is about time that the Labour party, instead of throwing accusations at the Government, answered these clear questions. The number of people treated by the national health service in Wales is at an all-time record. In the year to June 1990, 472,000 in-patients and 2,300,000 out-patients received treatment and diagnosis. Since 1979, the number of in-patients treated is up by 36·6 per cent., the number of out-patients by 29·8 per cent. and the number of day cases by a staggering 246 per cent.

Mr. Barry Jones: I welcome the building of two new hospitals in Wales. My hon. Friends have worked hard to persuade the Secretary of State and his predecessors to build those hospitals.

Bearing in mind the proposed staff losses and cuts in patient services at Guy's hospital, will the right hon. Gentleman commit himself to opposing any bids by health authorities or hospitals to opt out?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman has scored another spectacular own goal in attacking the Government's record on the health service in Wales, and he has not answered the question that I posed to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). If we still had a Labour Government, that Government would be spending £650 million less. I am proud of my record and that of my right hon. Friends in Wales, where we are now spending £602 for every man, woman and child.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the latest figures for unemployment in *(a)* Clwyd and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: There were 12,364 and 108,049.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. Those figures are horrendous.

The right hon. Gentleman had to cancel his visit to north Wales recently. However, I am sure that he had time to read the front page of the *Denbighshire Free Press*, which outlined the job losses in Boral Edenhall and ML Lifeguard. Will he consider pressing for regional development status for large areas in Wales to obtain European money to put matters right?

Mr. Hunt: I had the opportunity to meet Commissioner Millan last week. I reinforced the case, which I believe is strong, for Wales to continue to receive grants at the record level that it has been receiving them from the Community under this Government. As for the future of Wales, I wish that the doom and gloom merchants on the Opposition Benches would stop trying to talk down Wales, and would join the rest of us in talking up our prospects.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Secretary of State will be aware that, in recent months, the town of Holyhead has suffered considerably as a result of the loss of jobs in its port. Some money has been made available to improve the environment of the town, but little has been done in recent years to ensure that money is given for job creation. What plans has he or the Minister of State to improve the situation in Holyhead?

Mr. Hunt: I greatly regret the fact that the hon. Gentleman has chosen not to take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I believe that that appointment has been widely welcomed in Holyhead. During my visit there, when the hon. Gentleman was present, I received the message that there needed to be greater co-ordination of all the programmes affecting Ynys Môn and Holyhead. That is what my hon. Friend the Minister is now so competently doing.

Mr. Bevan: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that inward investment continues apace, and that real new jobs are being created?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, inward investment is reaching new record levels in Wales. I am delighted to be able to announce today six new projects involving £5 million in industrial investment. The six projects are backed by financial assistance from the Government, and range from telecommunications to climbing equipment. They include investment from German and Portuguese companies.

Mr. Ray Powell: Will the Secretary of State admit that unemployment in Wales is escalating right out of control, resulting in misery, heartache, degradation and domestic upheaval? Is he aware that the training and enterprise councils in Wales have created considerable unemployment in the past couple of months? Is he aware that my early-day motion 546 called for a parliamentary inquiry into Mid Glamorgan TECs where finances and appointments have gone astray? A thorough investigation is needed, because thousands of trainers and trainees have

been put on the dole as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's action. Will he set up that necessary public inquiry? If not, is it because this matter is too hot for him to handle?

Mr. Hunt: One day, the hon. Gentleman will recognise what most people in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom already recognise—that Wales has a marvellous system of training and enterprise councils. Wales was the first part of the United Kingdom where they were put into operation and they are doing a marvellous job. I congratulate everyone connected with the TEC movement on the work that they are doing. When the hon. Gentleman looks at the statistics, I hope that he will observe one in which I take great pride: that in the past four years, long-term unemployment has gone down by 69 per cent.—from 78,014 in January 1986 to 24,020 in January 1991.

Mr. Barry Jones: The right hon. Gentleman may wish to congratulate the six Welsh companies that have been given the Queen's award for industry, but, with unemployment rising at its fastest since the last Conservative recession, will he end his hesitant approach and bring forward a package of measures to help the Welsh unemployed? Does the Secretary of State back the Treasury or the Department of Employment in their dispute over special employment measures? It is far too glib of him to say that Wales is bucking the trend. There are far too many redundancies for that.

Mr. Hunt: I have already announced this year 1,600 new jobs involving £80 million of new investment, to which I am pleased that the Government are contributing £13·5 million. Today, Lansing Linde, the Voice Processing Company Ltd. in Abergavenny, Lucas Meyer, Riverside Plastics, Honkley Engineering and Marine Company and HB Climbing Equipment are all announcing new investment projects. It is about time that the Opposition paid tribute to that.

Health Authorities

4. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the performance of the new health authorities in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The annual review of district health authorities in the autumn will provide a major opportunity to assess authorities' performance in their new role as purchasers of health care. This will be backed up by rigorous monthly monitoring of in-year performance against the targets set in district health authorities' purchasing plans.

Mr. Howells: I am sure that the Minister is in favour of setting up the trust fund scheme in the national health service. Is he in a position to say how many hospitals in Wales have been consulted and how many he believes will opt for the new scheme? If he is, can he give an assurance to all Welsh hospital employees and to the people of Wales that it will not result in redundancies at the same rate as was announced last week for Guy's hospital and other hospitals in England?

Mr. Bennett: So far, the Pembrokeshire district health authority has expressed interest in becoming a national health service hospital trust. That authority is balloting its staff on the application. As for the hon. Gentleman's wider remarks, no Government can ever give a guarantee about the future and no party can ever say that the same financial disciplines as operate in the rest of the world will not operate in the national health service. That means that the NHS has to operate within the budget that is set for it at the beginning of each year.

Mr. Alan Williams: The Under-Secretary will recollect that over 18 months ago, his Department and the health authority set up an inquiry into the future of the casualty unit in Swansea. At a very constructive meeting, the hon. Gentleman told me that he intended to make an announcement before the end of the last financial year. As 30,000 signatures appear on a petition that was presented to his Department, will he bear in mind that there will be great bitterness if eventually it emerges that the reason for the delay—a delay that he had not anticipated—is that the announcement might harm his party in next Thursday's local elections?

Mr. Bennett: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is a matter of great concern to the people of Swansea and that is why we are considering the points that have been made most seriously. The right hon. Gentleman presented me with a petition of 30,000 signatures. I visited the unit myself and during that visit I received a deputation. We are now considering further representations. It is taking longer because we are consulting so widely. I hope to reach a decision shortly, but the plans were put forward by the West Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Hain: I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that a new hospital will be built for Neath and Port Talbot. It is long overdue and I congratulate the health unions, the community health council and local people for the way in which they have campaigned for many years to persuade the Welsh Office to support that new project. However, I remind the Secretary of State that there remains a deep health crisis in the area. For example, a constituent of mine who has been waiting 19 months for a cataract operation in Gwaun-cae-gurwen has been told that he will have to wait a further three months. The 1,400 patients on that waiting list are still waiting and the health authority has been told that it does not have the funding to meet that desperate need. When will the Government provide the necessary resources?

Mr. Bennett: I note what the hon. Gentleman says and I am grateful to him for his support for the new hospital. We greatly regret the increase in the waiting lists, but it is part of the success of the national health service that, because new technologies and treatments are becoming available and people are living longer, more people are being treated. That is an important fact to remember. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me about his constituent, I shall write to him about the matter, but we have set up three sub-regional treatment centres, one of which is for cataract operations.

Energy Savings

5. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much energy has been saved by the Welsh Office in each of the last five years; and what measures are being taken to make further savings for the future.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Energy consumption information is not available in a form that enables us to identify specific savings made in the years before 1990-91. Measures include the acquisition of a computer database to monitor performance, high efficiency lighting, water control and separate metering in the main headquarters buildings in Cathays park, and we aim to reduce energy expendifure by 15 per cent. over five years.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the Minister for that reply and for the measures being taken. However, the Government still reveal complacency when estimates using current technology and getting a return on investment show potential savings of at least 20 per cent. Therefore, the Minister's targets are well below those accepted elsewhere. Will the Minister review his programme with a view to making further savings in the Welsh Office and in other authorities in Wales where the Welsh Office has some influence?

Mr. Bennett: It is a bit tough to be accused of complacency when the Government have set up a special ministerial working party which constantly examines ways to save money in the Government's estate and when the Welsh Office is top of the league. We are No. 1 and we are working very hard to make sure that we have energy efficiency. That message is getting across not only in Government buildings but in schools and hospitals. The health service in Wales has already saved a considerable amount of money on energy efficiency.

Voluntary Organisations (Grants)

6. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the value of grants from his Department to voluntary organisations in each of the past three years.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): The latest available figures, at outturn prices, are £8·96 million in 1987-88, £9·35 million in 1988-89 and £11·66 million in 1989-90, a real terms increase of some 14 per cent. over the period.

Mr. Knox: By how much have grants increased in Wales since 1979 and how many organisations are in receipt of grants?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that since 1979-80 Welsh Office support has trebled in real terms, and some 320 voluntary bodies now benefit. It is the Government's policy to have a healthy and vigorous voluntary sector.

Local Government Finance

7. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has decided what proportion of the new local government charge in Wales will be levied on property tax; and what proportion will be poll tax.

Mr. David Hunt: The question does not arise, because I have already announced that I propose to abolish the community charge in Wales.

Mr. Williams: In his statement last week on the new council tax, the Secretary of State said that there will be transitional relief for people facing excessive increases under the new structure. Will the beneficiaries be the people who live in large houses, who benefited so unfairly from the poll tax? Does it make sense to continue to subsidise the better-off? Does the Minister accept that the poll tax punished the poor, whereas under the new structure banding and transitional relief will protect the rich?

Mr. Hunt: No. Transitional relief should be available under any new system, and we have made that absolutely clear. People in Wales would lose only if we returned to the old rating system. The hon. Gentleman will have seen the figures that I have published, which show that in 1989-90 —when Welsh people last paid rates—people paid on average £327. For this year, it would have had to increase to £385. In the coming year, the average bill per household for the new council tax will be £152. That is much fairer and better for the people of Wales.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that the figures are available in the Vote Office, as I have experienced some difficulty in obtaining them? English Members may be upset to see that people on the highest rate in England are paying £668, but those in Wales are paying only £272. The bottom rate in Wales is £109, but is £267 in England. Is there any justification for Welsh people, who have lower costs of living, being subsidised by English taxpayers?

Mr. Hunt: I understand that there has been rather a run on these exemplifications. According to my hon. Friend, the Vote Office has run out of copies, but as soon as I leave the Chamber, I shall ensure that further copies are made available. Under the Government, and only under the Government, Wales has had the best possible deal. Under a Labour Government, not only would we return to the unfair old rating system, with 1973 values and a complete revaluation, but average bills would leap up because we would be returning to the old Labour way of funding local services.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Secretary of State confirm the view expressed last week by the Secretary of State for the Environment that we shall be stuck with the poll tax for the next three years because the council tax in Wales cannot be introduced until the financial year 1994-95?

Mr. Hunt: That is not true. I had a positive and constructive meeting with the Assembly of Welsh County Councils and the Association of Welsh Districts. Consultation is well on course to introduce the council tax in Wales the year after next.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we have achieved the Wandsworth effect in parts of Wales only because of the intervention of my right hon. Friend and of the Chancellor of the Exchequer? No one in Wales will be worse off this year under the new council tax, compared with the community charges that were to be imposed by Liberal and Labour councils in Wales.

Mr. Hunt: That is true. The message on Thursday is simple for the people of Wales. If they vote Conservative, their councils will cost them less and they will get better services.

Mr. Murphy: As the Welsh people will have to put up with the poll tax for at least another two or three years, and as the Conservative party is squabbling about the nature of the new tax and its banding arrangements, does not the right hon. Gentleman believe that, despite being

surrounded by English colleagues, he should accept a uniquely Welsh solution to the poll tax by listening to the people of Wales, who overwhelmingly believe in a fair rates system and immediate abolition of the poll tax?

Mr. Hunt: I said that we are used to spectacular own goals by the Labour party, but we have just heard the best. The hon. Gentleman admitted that there is no prospect of a Labour Government when he said that the poll tax will remain in Wales for three years. In any event, that is untrue. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to the answer that I gave a few moments ago, he would know that we are well on course to introduce the new council tax the year after next.

If people read "Fair Rates", they will not only remember that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) once called rates the most unjust form of all taxes but see that the proposed rates system would involve going straight back to the old registers, which were introduced in 1973, and then having a complete revaluation. That would be bad news for the whole of Wales.

Waiting Lists, Clwyd

8. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the amount of Welsh Office funding made available to Clwyd health authority over the last five years to reduce waiting lists.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since the inception of the waiting times initiative in 1986, Clwyd health authority has received funding of over £330,000 to assist its own efforts in tackling waiting lists.

Mr. Raffan: Why has Clwyd health authority received only that amount out of a total of £5·35 million for reducing waiting lists in Wales? Is my hon. Friend aware that that constitutes a little over 5 per cent. of the total amount, whereas Clwyd health authority covers 14 per cent. of the population in Wales, its in-patient waiting list has increased by 9·2 per cent. on last year and its out-patient waiting list has increased by 10·6 per cent. on last year?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend forgets that out of the sum for the waiting times initiative comes the funding for the three treatment centres, which take up the largest proportion of the available money. Since 1979 in Clwyd, the number of in-patients treated, including day cases, has risen by 45 per cent. and the number of out-patients treated by 21 per cent. This year, we increased Clwyd health authority's budget by 9·8 per cent. Since 1979, the health authority's total increase has been 50 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister assure us that any increase in the funding available to Clwyd health authority will not be swallowed up by additional administrative costs? That is happening in Gwynedd, where, over the next two months, no fewer than 56 additional posts will be created—for example, for contract officers and business managers—at a cost of £800,000 a year. That finance needs to be at the sharp end to provide services for the people on waiting lists.

Mr. Bennett: It is important that health authorities operate within a properly managed system. That is why we have introduced reforms. They mean that people must keep track of how money is spent, so that we do not have health authorities running out of money two thirds of the way through the year because they have not been managed properly. Sixty-three per cent. of our staff are front-line staff, compared with 57 per cent. in 1979.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Is not it true that in Clwyd health authority, as in all health authorities in Wales, the health service is grossly underfunded compared with virtually every other western European country? Is not it time that the Minister gave a commitment that not a single health authority in Wales will run out of money by the end of this financial year and that a general practitioner can continue to refer his or her patients to any hospital in the country? Will the hon. Gentleman give a commitment that all the health authorities and GPs will be funded and will not run out of money?

Mr. Bennett: I cannot give that commitment—any more than the Leader of the Opposition could on the "Walden" programme yesterday when challenged on this matter. If we were to run the health service at the last Labour Government's expenditure level, £650 million less would be spent. Under the Conservative Government, spending on the health service has increased by 56 per cent. in real terms.

Prefabricated Houses, Swansea

9. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the assistance he will provide to Swansea city council to enable it to deal with the problem of prefabricated reinforced concrete houses.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have today announced an extra £4·29 million to 10 Welsh housing authorities to assist them in dealing with prefabricated reinforced concrete houses. I am pleased to say that the bid from Swansea city council for the reinstatement of private sector PRCs in the city will be met in full.

Mr. Anderson: That welcome reply covers only part of the matter. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the assistance covers post-April 1984 houses? Do the Government accept Swansea city council's strategy for dealing with PRC houses—on the basis of the consultant's report, which advises covering the 1,301 houses over five years? Will the hon. Gentleman sympathetically consider Swansea city council's proposals—I confess that they have not yet been submitted to the Welsh Office—for additional funding to deal with PRC houses to ensure that money is available not just for those houses but for other sectors of housing in the city? Will he ensure that grants are available for refurbishment and site clearance? That is clearly the responsibility of the city council, not the housing associations.

Mr. Bennett: I welcome the fact that Swansea city council's strategy involves working with housing associations and I shall certainly give sympathetic consideration to any further bids made by the city council. Clearly, however, I cannot make a pre-judgment on that and we shall consider resources when bids are made.

Rail Travel (Safety)

10. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the state of the rail network in Wales, including aspects of safety.

12. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken to improve safety of rail travel in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Rail at regular intervals to discuss a range of issues. They last met on 8 February and expect to do so again later this year. British Rail's plans for maintaining and improving its safety record are set out in its safety plan, which was published in February.

Mr. Davies: The Minister of State may be aware that recently a young constituent of mine, who was coming home on leave from the Navy, fell to his death from a train between Newport and Cardiff. I do not wish to comment on the details of that case, but does the Minister agree that there is a considerable impression—based on observation—that British Rail staff are unable to ensure that train doors are shut tight before a train leaves a station? Does he further agree that if someone falls from a train when a door is not defective and has not been opened from the inside the only reasonable conclusion is that the door was not shut tight at the preceding station?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I know of the specific case to which the right hon. Gentleman refers and we extend our sympathy to the young man's family. I cannot comment on that particular case, but the provisional figures for passenger fatalities caused by falls from trains in 1990 was 19, the same as it was for the previous two years. We have received coroners' reports on 11 of those 19 cases and none of the 11 deaths was caused by faulty door locks. From 1985 to 1989 there was no evidence of faulty doors resulting in one such death.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister agree that it is a sad state of affairs that a leading newspaper, for example, can point out that there may have been more than 100 deaths during the past six years, which were not explained, by people falling out of trains? If doors can be opened during a journey, does he agree that we should be well advised to consider other systems of ensuring that doors remain locked and that passengers cannot open them? Will he ask British Rail what proposals it has for incorporating such a design feature into new rolling stock and whether it will modify existing rolling stock to ensure that doors do not open during journeys?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I assure the hon. Gentleman that independent consultants were appointed by British Rail and they concluded that train doors are safe. Their report has been considered by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate, which will decide whether further action is necessary. I assure the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman that British Rail investigates fully every fall from a train and its report and that from the coroner's inquest are made available to Her Majesty's railway inspectorate. Even if a door is not closed properly, there is a safety catch device which prevents it from opening.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the draft Labour Budget produced by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) there was not one extra penny for investment in the railway system and that the best way to get more money invested in the railway is to privatise it so that, like other privatised industries, it can go into the marketplace and obtain other capital investment?

Sir Wyn Roberts: Although that is technically a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, I assure my hon. Friend that there have been no financial constraints on safety expenditure. The Government endorsed in full expenditure of £70 million on additional safety measures in 1990-91 and British Rail plans to spend more than £300 million over the next three years. Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend that the privatisation of British Rail is much to be desired.

Community Charge Rebate Scheme

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* in opposition to the Welsh community charge rebate scheme for the coming year.

Mr. David Hunt: There were 126, expressing a variety of views.

Mr. Flynn: I am not very grateful for that evasion. May I point out to the Secretary of State that since he has been so generous in confessing that the presented demented system of reliefs in Wales is his brainchild, the system has become known as the "David Hunt levy". Will he give a guarantee that in the unlikely event that he is still in office in a year's time, my constituents in Bassaleg, Rhiwderin, Rogerstone, Allt-yr-yn and Caerleon, who now pay £50 more on the David Hunt levy than do their neighbours in other parts of Newport, will be compensated and that the crazy system will be ended?

Mr. Hunt: This is another own goal by the hon. Gentleman. We are talking about a system that brought an additional £62 million to Wales. That means—I have to whisper this because of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset (Mr. Bruce)—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is not here."] What a relief! The average community charge paid in Wales this year will be £92 and that is before rebate. The hon. Gentleman should ask the Leader of the Opposition to confess that as well as the national health service not having a high priority in Labour party plans, local government does not have a high priority either. We may go back to the system of support that existed when there was last a Labour Government, which is very bad news for the people of Wales.

Mr. Rowlands: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Unless something has arisen during Question Time which requires my immediate attention, I take points of order later.

Mr. Rowlands: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I know that I did not call the hon. Gentleman, but that is not a matter for a point of order. I will take the point of order later.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Gulf War Church Service, Glasgow

30. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, whether they will be officially represented at the service at St. Mungo's cathedral, Glasgow, on 4 May in relation to the Gulf war.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): No, Sir, although each Church of England diocesan bishop attending is a Church Commissioner.

Mr. Dalyell: Whereas it is quite proper that service men and their families should want to give thanks for their safe return, is it really in good taste that politicians should be present, given that the Kurds are in the mountains, the Shias are in the marshes, the war is clearly not over, Karbala and Najaf are in ruins and the United Nations has disowned the whole project?

Mr. Alison: The old Church of England litany—I know that we are talking about the Church of Scotland—prays for divine deliverance from lightning and tempest, from plague, pestilence and famine and from battle, murder and sudden death. Many hundreds of young men in our forces in the Gulf will have echoed that prayer for deliverance, as will many thousands of their loved ones and hon. Members of all parties. Most people will feel that it is no bad thing that the survivors and their families and the hon. Members responsible for sending them to the Gulf should express their thanksgiving for their safe return in a religious service that will also remember the fallen.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that those of us who lost young men from our constituencies during the war recognise the importance of the service for their families? We welcome especially the fact that it will be an ecumenical service. That does not mean that any of us who attends will forget the problems that confront the Kurds and the Shi'ites in Iraq.

Mr. Alison: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments which, perhaps not proportionately to the strength of her party in the House, represent the overwhelming view of most Scotsmen, Englishmen, Welshmen and Irishmen of the merits of the service.

Sir John Stokes: Are not we an extraordinary nation in that when we are to have a service such as this, at which church and state are to be fully represented, some seek to run it down in this House, which is supposed to represent most people in the country? Surely we should be thankful that the service is to be held and thankful to God that our men came back safely.

Mr. Alison: I thoroughly endorse my hon. Friend's view, although I should pay the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) the credit that I am sure is his due. He will have been invited, he has a military past and I very much hope that he will take the opportunity to attend the service.

Women Commissioners

31. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many Church Commissioners are women.

Mr. Alison: Six, Sir.

Mr. Banks: That is a disgracefully small number given that, by my calculations, there are about 95 commissioners. Should not the right hon. Gentleman put pressure on the Church Commissioners to ensure that women are more adequately represented on the body? The Church is talking about having women priests. I support that principle and see no reason why we should not have women bishops or, indeed, a woman Pope—although I realise that the right hon. Gentleman does not answer for the Catholic religion. In the circumstances, would not it look much better for the Church if it had more women commissioners to start with?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman has launched into a typical diatribe—as usual without having done adequate research. Of the total of 95 commissioners, 43 are diocesan bishops and it is no fault of the Church of England that there are no women bishops at present. Of the remainder of the commissioners, more than half are elected by the general assembly of the general synod of the Church of England. That electoral process produces as few women as the Labour party's electoral process produces women in the Labour party.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Staff Pay and Conditions

36. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether he proposes any changes to the procedures for setting pay and conditions for House of Commons staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. A. J. Beith (On behalf of the House of Commons Commissioners): No, Sir. There is a statutory responsibility imposed on the Commission by the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978 to keep the pay and grading of staff in the House broadly in line with those in the home civil service.

Mr. Skinner: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, on average, the staff in the canteen work for 47 hours a week and receive take-home pay of about £134? We should compare that with the bosses, who have recently managed to secure an extra 22·7 per cent. Tesco's boss is to get another £1 million a year, for example. Yet here in the House of Commons, the young people in the canteen are expected to work during the parliamentary recess, when Members of Parliament are on holiday, and this year they will have to work an extra five hours every week during the recess for no extra pay. Is not it time that the hon. Gentleman—this Liberal Democrat—did something about that?

Mr. Beith: The arrangements that I have described were set up when a Labour Government were in power. The House of Commons Commission seeks to represent all parties in the House. We have no responsibility for pay outside the House and our responsibility inside it is to

ensure the link with civil service pay to which I referred. However, the Establishments Office is currently consulting the relevant unions as part of the process of conducting a review of the pay and grading of industrial and non-industrial grades employed by Departments of the House.

Telephone Bill

37. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the House of Commons telephone bill for the last 12 months.

Mr. Beith: The estimated cost of telecommunications services for the House in the last financial year is £2,169,982.

Mr. Banks: I am sure that we get great benefit from that expenditure, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, there are a considerable number of complaints about the telephone services that we receive. This is not a criticism of the staff, but those outside—our constituents and others who try to contact us—are always complaining about the time that it takes for the telephones to be answered. That is British Telecom's responsibility because BT sends in the people to staff the switchboard. Clearly, it is not doing the job properly. I am not in favour of Mercury and I was certainly not in favour of the privatisation of BT. However, now that BT has been privatised, cannot we consider the alternatives? For example, Mercury says that it can produce a saving of £50,000 a year and provide a better service. The hon. Gentleman should get off his behind and do something, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) suggested.

Mr. Beith: The running of telecommunications services is a matter for the Services Committee. I understand that, some time ago, the Committee considered a request to allow Mercury to provide a share of the outgoing lines, but recommended no change. However, the matter is still under consideration. The hon. Gentleman will know that there are Mercury call-boxes within the precincts of the House.

Crèche

39. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what latest consideration he has given for the provision of crèche facilities for staff.

Mr. Beith: At its meeting on 13 February the Services Committee approved in principle the provision of child care facilities for Members, their staff and staff of the House. The House of Commons Commission has agreed that an examination should now take place to identify what accommodation could be allocated for that purpose and has instructed that further steps should be set in train to determine the likely costs and other financial implications. Once these are known, a survey of potential demand will be undertaken and a final decision taken on whether to proceed.

Mr. Cohen: I welcome the very belated decision of the Services Committee to agree in principle to the provision of child-care facilities. The hon. Gentleman will recall a feasibility study which indicated that there was not the necessary political will to provide a crèche. Can we be assured that that is no longer the case and that all existing accommodation will be scrutinised? The matter should not be left for the phase 2 programme some time in the next century. Staff members and their trade unions are asking whether the hon. Gentleman is serious about the provision of a crèche, or whether he is just toying with the idea.

Mr. Beith: I am certainly in favour of the House proceeding quickly to the establishment of these facilities. However, the Services Committee is responsible for seeing whether, in our very crowded building, suitable accommodation can be found in advance of phase 2. Obviously that is important if rapid progress is to be made.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

British Members of the European Parliament

40. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to allow greater involvement in the House and its Committees by British Members of the European Parliament.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Active consideration is currently being given to ways in which British Members of the European Parliament can have improved access to the House. The relevant Sub-Committees of the Services Committee have been instructed to consider what refreshment facilities can be extended to them, and to what degree they may be given formal access to the Chamber and to Committees of the House. I hope to receive some recommendations shortly.

Mr. Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those of us who support the democratic role of the House and recognise its importance would regard it as being of great value if members of the European Parliament were able to speak, but not vote, in our Committees—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—so that we might have much earlier warning of what happens in the European Parliament? Would not that be in the interests of this House? *[Interruption.]* What do we have to be afraid of?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will be aware that his suggestion has turned out to be somewhat controversial, at least among hon. Members in the Chamber at the moment. However, I agree that it is right to explore ways in which closer exchanges might take place. In the context of the intergovernmental conference on political union, it is important to remember that this House is one of the most active legislative bodies when it comes to scrutinising European Community legislation. We want to see a similar situation elsewhere and that will involve some degree of co-operation.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Leader of the House aware of the standards that Members of the European Parliament enjoy? If he is thinking about inviting them to share our dining facilities, he will have to ensure that the standard of the food in this place is greatly improved. I have been a Member of Parliament for 20 years and the menu in the Harcourt Room has not changed once in that time.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the menu has changed. The question of access to our refreshment facilities, particularly some of those that are available to hon.

Members, is currently being considered by the Sub-Committee. I do not think that relative standards are being taken into account; the question under consideration is access.

Mr. Jessel: Can my right hon. Friend say why legislators in this House should be expected to pool their facilities with an advisory body?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that there is any question of pooling facilities. Given that Members of the British Parliament have access to facilities of the European Parliament, the question is whether some facilities here may be made available to Members of the European Parliament with a view to widening the exchange of views.

Environment Debates

41. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what percentage of parliamentary time has been spent on debating the problem of the national and global environment in each of the Sessions of the current Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not possible to estimate the amount of time spent on environmental matters in the House because of the variety of opportunities for debate. The House is already clear about the priority which the Government are giving to such matters.

Mr. Hughes: That is a very convenient cop-out of an answer, if I may say so. The reality is that the Department of the Environment spent most of its time ensuring that the House debated poll tax, son of poll tax or grandchild of poll tax. As a result, little Government time was spent on environmental issues. Will the Leader of the House accept that as a fact? Will he consider seriously allowing the House to establish the precedent of an annual debate, as part of the routine of the House, on the state of the global, continental and national environment?

Mr. MacGregor: Attention to local government finance has not been confined to the Government side of the Chamber. Both sides of the House have focused their attention on it and the issue has been raised outside Government time. I accept, however, that the matter has been raised rather more extensively than others. I hope that we shall now see a greater concentration on other issues. The Government's proposals on local government finance have received a warm welcome from many quarters.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the extensive White Paper that the Government produced on environmental matters. We have already taken up almost 100 of the initiatives set out in it. That is a clear sign of the priority that we give to such matters and the way in which we act on them. We must be cautious about the number of commitments that we give to annual debates on various subjects. I should be happy, however, to see further debates on environmental matters when they can be fitted into the time table.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the Select Committee on the Environment has been extremely busy over some years trying to bring to the attention of the House, and to a wider audience, the problems that will be generated by global warming? Some months ago the Committee placed before the House a good report on the problems that will arise from the decline of the jungles, but the House has not had an opportunity to debate it and does not seem likely to have one, unless someone gets a move on. The greatest threat that faces mankind is its destruction of its natural environment and the House should have an opportunity to debate it.

Mr. MacGregor: Let me assure my hon. Friend that we take all international environmental matters extremely seriously, as can be seen from the many initiatives that the Government have taken. Many matters have had to be dealt with during the Session, not least the Gulf war. It is not possible to have general debates on every subject, but many opportunities are available to hon. Members to raise matters of concern.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Leader of the House reflect on what was an unsatisfactory answer? Surely he cannot claim any longer that there is a shortage of parliamentary time. It is crystal clear to us all that the Government are having enormous difficulty filling up the time that is available during the run-in to the general election. If, as increasingly seems likely, there will be an extremely long run-in, with the Government running away, would not it be a good idea to have some set-piece televised debates on the environment, on unemployment, on the poll tax, on hospital trusts and on other issues that will confront the nation during the next general election?

Mr. MacGregor: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. We are carrying through a larger legislative programme this Session than last, with more Bills coming before the House. As he will have seen from the timetable in recent weeks—he will certainly see it in weeks to come—there is a great deal to do on the legislative front and that work will take a great deal of parliamentary time.

European Standing Committees

42. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received calling for procedural changes to ensure that motions and amendments agreed by European Standing Committees are placed before the House for consideration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received no such representations other than those from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Taylor: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the Government made it clear that the views of the Committees would not necessarily be reported to the House unless the Government found them acceptable, hardly anyone is bothering to attend the sittings of these rather irrelevant Committees? On Wednesday last week, only four Members were present at the end of the sitting. Is he aware also that a further crisis has arisen because Ministers are not reporting on the proposed legislation as it is? Instead, they are reporting on what they think it might be by the time that Committee considers it. On Wednesday, with a huge crisis looming for British potato crisps manufacture, which could lose 600 jobs in this country, there was not one word about the issue in the papers before the Committee or in the Government motion. Would not it be better to scrap the Committees rather than have a democratic front?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not think that it would be right to scrap the Committees. As I said at the outset, I believe that they are an effective way in which the House can carry out scrutiny. I have said that I am prepared to review those Committees, but I do not think that it would be right to scrap them.

With regard to my hon. Friend's point about Government motions before the House, he will know of one case about which he and I have corresponded. In that regard, the Government acted entirely in accordance with the Standing Orders. However, in view of my hon. Friend's concern, I have asked the House authorities to consider whether the Order Paper can make the position clearer in such cases, perhaps with the date of the resolution passed by the Standing Committee being printed in the Order Paper beside the Government motion. I am also considering further my hon. Friend's idea about how that may be changed.

Mr. Pike: Does the Leader of the House accept that all members of those European Committees believe that it is absolute nonsense that a motion agreed unanimously and as amended is reported to the House in accordance with the Standing Orders of the House, but is then not the motion moved by the Government at a subsequent stage? The Committee then has the right to table an amendment, but not to speak to it or explain reasons. That is totally unsatisfactory and if no changes are made to the procedure, Members will refuse to attend those Committees.

Mr. MacGregor: I make it clear that that happened on only one occasion. The change was made because, as the Minister explained to all members of the Committee, the actual terms of the motion were, in the Government's view, inaccurate and did not represent the position. Therefore, on that occasion, the Government tabled a motion and it would have been possible for any member of the Committee to table an amendment. However, as I said, I constantly review the way in which those Committees work and I am now considering whether this can be done differently if a similar situation arises in future.

European Community (Communications)

43. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a further statement on the extension of official telephone and postal facilities to hon. Members for contacts with the institutions of the European Community in Brussels and elsewhere, pursuant to his answer of 25 March, *Official Report*, column 607.

Mr. MacGregor: I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that the House of Commons Commission has now approved arrangements to enable hon. Members to make free official telephone calls to institutions of the European Community and to certain other European organisations. A notice setting out the short direct dialling codes of the respective exchanges has already been sent to Members. Arrangements have also been approved to enable Members to send official mail free of charge to countries of the European Community. It is hoped that the service will be brought into use immediately after the spring recess.

Mr. Dykes: May I thank my right hon. Friend most warmly for his speed in handling those matters once he assumed his present office? At present, hon. Members can telphone Europe from their own offices. Will he ensure that we can use specific dial handsets in other parts of the Palace of Westminster as quickly as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The initial list of the extensions that may be dialled direct reflects the present capacity of the telephone exchange to accept such calls. However, the system will be upgraded within the next 12 months and that will provide increased capacity for further direct dialling to Europe. I am not sure whether that will make my hon. Friend's suggestion irrelevant, but I shall consider his suggestion. It is probably preferable to stick to the arrangements that we have already made.

NHS Trusts

3.32 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the business plans for self-governing trusts and recently announced job losses.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): The prospectuses of the trusts were published last year. There were no "secret" business plans. The business plans, which are required to be returned to the national health service management executive in the early part of this year, are part of the arrangements for monitoring both NHS trusts and directly managed units by the national health service management executive. As management documents, they were never intended under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 to be public documents. The annual report of each trust will of course be published.

That leads me to a wider point about accountability. For the first time, we now have a system in place where, through the contractual arrangements, hospitals will be fully accountable to the district health authorities for the quality and quantity of the services they provide for patients.

Within that reformed system my job is to ensure that patients have the access that they need to comprehensive, free, health care. I exercise this responsibility through a strengthened chain of accountability from districts through regions to the NHS management executive.

With this accountability for the provision of health care goes more delegated management freedom for the hospitals themselves, including directly managed units. It is not for Governments to tell hospitals how to organise their services and how many staff to employ. That must be a matter for the hospitals themselves. In a service that employs over 1 million people, it would be ludricous if Ministers or civil servants attempted to run the service from Whitehall.

What I sought last year, and will seek this year when examining trust applications, is a management team which will match in professionalism the professional standards of the doctors and nurses themselves. For far too long we have had outstanding clinical professionalism allied to second-rate management systems. One cause of that over the years has been the political intervention in what are properly management decisions, of which this bogus pre-local elections row, stirred up by the Opposition parties, is a classic example.

Referring to the situation in London, I have noted the comprehensive review of their hospital proposed by the new management at Guy's. I am pleased to note that they have given a number of undertakings: that patient care will not suffer; that compulsory redundancies will be used only as a last resort; that services in the local community will be protected; and that quality of service is an overriding objective.

I am also pleased to be able to reassure the House that Lewisham and North Southwark health authority, in whose district Guy's hospital is situated, believes that the contracts which it has let to Guy's, and to other hospitals, provide satisfactorily for the health needs of its resident population. Moreover, it recognises that prompt action is needed to tackle the financial situation at Guy's, and prefers that to unplanned action later in the year.

I am also pleased to record that, in Bradford, no reduction in services or activity is planned by the trust. It is the judgment of the public health authorities in the city that some increase in emphasis in primary and community services is right for local people. It is likely that, in terms of staff numbers, any reductions in hospital staff would be more than offset by further increases in community nursing and in the resources available to GPs.

The proposals by those two trusts illustrate a fundamental point. Neither district health authorities nor hospital managers are any longer prepared to accept that, simply because a hospital has always provided a certain service in a certain way, they should necessarily continue to do so. The needs of the patients they serve are constantly changing. Leading hospitals like Guy's and Bradford need to respond to those changes. Hospitals that can adapt successfully to change will flourish and expand. That is what I believe we are beginning to see happen in Bradford and south-east London; and, since any savings will go straight back into the health service, it will be the patient now, and in the future, who benefits.

Labour Members have nothing to say on health. Their leader yesterday finally let the cat out of the bag: under Labour there would be no more money for health. They have no proposals for dealing with the obvious managerial problems of the service. Their sole interest is in playing party politics with it. Their behaviour over the past few days is the final proof, if any was needed, that that is the truth.

Mr. Cook: The Secretary of State's assurance that health authorities are happy with the cuts would carry more weight if those health authorities represented anybody in the community for whom they now administer the health service.

Will the Secretary of State explain to the House how he reconciles his many statements over the weekend and his statement today to the House that there will be no cuts in patient care with the financial memorandum of Guy's, which was leaked today to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), and which states that managers recognise that in acute services there will be

"inevitable reductions in direct patient care"

and that in mental health services, which are local services, there will be "substantial reductions in service"? After those internal statements by the management of Guy's itself, should not the Secretary of State apologise for all those misleading statements?

If the business plans are to assist the Government in monitoring the progress of the trusts, why cannot those business plans be published so that we can all assist in the monitoring? What is in those business plans that needs to be hidden? How many more of those business plans contain cuts similar to those that we have heard about at Guy's this past weekend?

Will the Secretary of State publish the report on trusts from Coopers and Lybrand? Will he now tell the House what he has already told journalists—that last November Coopers and Lybrand found that only 12 of the 57 trusts had plans with which there were no financial difficulties? If that is true, was it not totally irresponsible of the right hon. Gentleman to go ahead with all 57 trusts? How did he keep

[Mr. Cook]

a straight face when he told the House on 4 December that, in deciding which hospitals should opt out, the key criterion was financial viability?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also explain how Guy's can be so much in debt and yet can afford to pay its chief executive the highest salary in the entire NHS? Is he aware that, in the past year, Guy's has advertised 44 new management posts at a total cost of £1·3 million—one quarter of its deficit? Will he explain how it can be value for money to hire more managers on bigger salaries to run a reduced service?

Finally, after this weekend, does not the Secretary of State realise that leaving hospitals to sink or swim in the marketplace is regarded by the public as a wholly unacceptable way of running their health service? Will he now accept that he cannot plough ahead with the second wave of opt-outs while hospitals in the first wave are foundering?

May I give you and the House notice, Mr. Speaker, that the Opposition will return to this matter until we get an assurance from the Secretary of State that he will not take any more decisions on opt-out until the people of Britain have had their say in a general election about the health service they want?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that hospitals are not being left to sink or swim in the marketplace. Hospitals are being asked to respond to specific contracts from public health authorities to provide the services at the quality and the quantity that are needed. That is what we are seeing, and it will provide much better and more comprehensive health care.

The hon. Gentleman has once again shown that he has not troubled to understand the reforms that he criticises. It is not for a single hospital to provide comprehensive health care across the range that is needed by a district. Indeed, there are seven major hospitals and other minor hospitals within range of the district that we are talking about, and it is for those hospitals together to provide comprehensive health care, responding to the district's contracts. That is what the district is perfectly prepared to say that it has achieved.

We have discussed the Coopers and Lybrand reports before in the House. It is true that Coopers and Lybrand stated that a minority of the trusts had no financial problems at all. My judgment was that the new managements that we were seeking were far more likely to solve the underlying problems than the old systems that had created those very problems. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may think that that is odd, but it seems crazy that he should wish to return to the system that caused those problems in the first place.

The hon. Gentleman was forced by the House to back down two weeks ago in his threats to NHS managers, and his spending pledges were shot out of the water by his leader yesterday. He has no credibility whatsoever.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Is the Secretary of State aware that the cuts of £12·8 million in the Guy's and Lewisham budget in one year is the largest cut for any NHS unit since the national health service was set up? Did the right hon. Gentleman approve the plan last autumn knowing that there would be that cut, or did he learn of the nature and size of the cut after he had approved the plan but before the cuts came into operation in April?

Is the Secretary of State aware that his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), the then Secretary of State for Health, told me in a debate in the House in the early hours of 13 March that one of the criteria for approving an opt-out plan was that services for the local community in Lewisham and Southwark would be preserved? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that almost nobody working at any level in Guy's hospital or using it as a patient believes that an overstretched, overworked work force can suffer a cut of 10 per cent. in its numbers and budget without the risk of the health care that is provided in the inner city being substantially affected for the worse?

Is not the reality that the Secretary of State has power, if he wishes to use it, under his legislation, to dissolve a health service trust? Should he not now dissolve that trust and allow that unit to be part of the national health service with everything else?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hospital is part of the national health service, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He has misunderstood what it is proposing, which surprises me, because I know that he has been in touch with the hospital. It is not proposing £12 million-worth of cuts. It has to put its underlying deficit in order, which amounts to about half that figure, and wishes to redirect another £6 million towards growing services, which is different from what the hon. Gentleman said. Among other things, it is saying that it will preserve and perhaps develop the local community aspects of its hospitals.

Indeed it is true that the hospital is overstretched, as are others in London. As anyone who knows anything about the NHS realises, there has been over-provision of total hospital numbers in London for 50 years as the population has moved away. Now we have to fund hospitals in London properly to offer the services needed in London, in addition to the specialties that are more widely needed. That is what Guy's is proposing to do, and that will secure its long-term future rather than going from crisis management to crisis management, which is what has happened for more than 20 years.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Secretary of State now do what his junior Minister refused to do last Wednesday: will he propose an emergency funding package to ensure that there are no redundancies or service cuts in hospitals in Bradford? The people of Bradford whose health needs are most acute do not want their hospitals to become supermarkets. We are not dealing with cans of food and packets of cornflakes; we are dealing with sick people, and we know that patient care will suffer if there are cuts.

The people of Bradford do not trust the trust, and most of all they do not trust the Government, because they know that the national health service is unsafe in Tory hands. They want the necessary money, staff and patient care, and, most of all, the damage that the Government have done to the NHS in the past 12 years to be repaired.

Mr. Waldegrave: They have been firmly told by the leader of the Labour party that they will not get a penny more from a Labour Government. The health service in Bradford and elsewhere in this country, and throughout the world, is developing in different ways. Primary care is

developing fast in Bradford, which has had some of the most dramatic improvements in the size of GP lists. I suspect that that is the way in which things will go in the future, with further development of primary and community services in Bradford.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to defend for ever the exact pattern of the hospital services that we have now, he will be in the position that his party has always been in —looking backwards, defending private interests—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—defending producer interests. I am perfectly prepared to stand by my accusation about private interests, too. The Labour party is more concerned with the interests of the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees than with patients. That remains as true now as it has been in the past.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a serious matter when the professor of surgery at Guy's warns publicly that manpower has got out of control and that management must get a grip on it? Would not management be failing in its duty to patients and to health care in the area if it ignored such remarks? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although it is regrettable that people should lose their jobs, especially in the health service, if the public can be satisfied that that will mean fewer ward closures, more patients being treated and more operations rather than have the Opposition's promises, that is the way forward?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. The Labour party proposes to return us to the old management systems that created the problems with which the House is all too familiar. We are now doing the right thing, which is to put the management in the hospitals where it should be. When the management of one of our great hospitals takes action early in the year to balance its budget, that seems to me responsible behaviour which is in the interests of the patients and should be applauded.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Is the Secretary of State aware that, despite its size and importance, Lewisham hospital has always been considered the poor relation of Guy's? Indeed, he did not even mention it today. Having been dragged into the Guy's and Lewisham trust, Lewisham hospital is now in grave danger of being dragged down by it.

How many staff posts are to be cut at Lewisham hospital? What will be the reduction in the service standards available at that hospital? What will be the impact on mental health services, which are so crucial to the inner-city constituency that I represent? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me whether the surgical ward that was closed temporarily last year will now be reopened as planned? What will be the impact on the imminent transfer of children's services from Sydenham hospital to Lewisham? Is phase 2 of Lewisham hospital still secure? Is it really true that my constituents have nothing to worry about, as he suggests?

Mr. Waldegrave: As a result of this electioneering campaign, they are probably worried now. The hon. Lady is quite right to rebuke me for not using the full title of the Guy's and Lewisham trust, because it is essential that Lewisham hospital as well as Guy's should have the full attention of management. I can tell the hon. Lady's constituents that those two hospitals are safe, and that the proposals will develop their long-term future. As I am sure she understands, it is the duty of the district health authority to ensure comprehensive health care for her constituents. It has told me that it has no doubt that, with these changes, it will be able to ensure that.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Does my right hon. Friend think that the first priority of the NHS should be to provide jobs or to provide a high standard of health care? If the trustees of Guy's or any other hospital believe —as the Guy's trustees do—that, by cutting costs, hospitals can provide a higher standard of care for the people in the immediate community, and, through contracts, for those outside the area—and, in so doing, provide better pay and conditions for their own staff—should they not be commended rather than criticised?

Mr. Waldegrave: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The number of people employed in the health service has increased at about twice the rate of the number of patients treated. We cannot be proud of that; it does not show a very impressive gain in efficiency over the years.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said this morning on television that he could not guarantee that jobs would not have to be lost in different parts of the health service, and that the number of jobs might have to be reduced in some areas. He might like to tell the House where he believes the number of jobs should be reduced, but he was right in saying that. The total number of doctors and nurses increases, but the shape and pattern of health care must change over the years.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Did the Secretary of State know, when he approved the detailed proposals for the Bradford trust, that one of its first actions would be to sack newly qualified nurses, and that, within a month of taking over the operation of all the acute hospitals in Bradford, it would announce the sacking of 300 staff at a saving of £7 million? If the Secretary of State knew that, was it not incompetent of him to allow the plan to go ahead? If he did not know that, does it not show that he is treated with complete contempt by the people who made those proposals?

The people of Bradford rejected the trust; the doctors, nurses and health workers rejected it. Why did not the Secretary of State listen to those people instead of to the spivs he appointed to run it? People will be satisfied that something is being done only when this miserable, incompetent Minister resigns.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sure that the Minister— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman was, I believe, a Minister in the Labour Government at the time that the International Monetary Fund arrived here. Inadvertently, I am sure, he gave a wrong fact to the House. As he well knows, there is no question of 300 sackings in Bradford. The trust has made it perfectly clear that it thinks it likely that there will not need to be any compulsory redundancies. It has already fulfilled a considerable part of its target by not filling vacancies. I hope, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his remark that there will be 300 sackings.

Last year I had to judge whether the management offered by the new trust was better and more likely to produce good health care for the people of Bradford than the existing system. I have no hesitation in saying that that

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is so, that the hospital's quality will improve, and that it will maintain its output of work, as it says it intends to do over the next year.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in hospital trusts, such as the two in Leeds, the management are rightly asking the practitioners how they can get costs down so that they can treat more patients? Whereas in the past there was the long-term problem of financial pressures which sometimes involved cuts, under the new trust system there is no logic whatsoever in reducing patient numbers, because that would simply reduce income.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no difference in the importance that both trusts and directly managed units ought to lay on finding proper cost savings to plough back into health care. As the Prime Minister made clear over the weekend, every penny of savings from this or any other exercise in the NHS goes straight back into health care. The Opposition ought to welcome that. Our job is to see that the funds that we vote treat efficiently as many patients as possible and at as high a quality as possible.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Does the Secretary of State realise that his comment that the anxieties of people up and down the country are related to electioneering does him no credit and adds not one iota to his own job security? What does he have to say to the people of Leeds, three weeks after the introduction of the hospital trust at the general infirmary? Its chief executive has told unit trust managers to make cuts of £5 million in services——

Dr. Hampson: Five per cent.

Mr. Fatchett: Five per cent. of £100 million is £5 million. It would help if there were some numeracy among Government Members.

Can the right hon. Gentleman explain to the people of Leeds that that will not add to the waiting list and that it will not reduce patient care?

Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Coopers and Lybrand report said that the Leeds general infirmary trust was not financially viable and that it would inevitably lead to cuts in services and jobs? Why does not the Secretary of State publish that report? Why did he let the trust go ahead in the knowledge that it would result in a cut in patient services?

Mr. Waldegrave: On the matter of electioneering, it seems to me a little more than a coincidence that this bogus campaign should be launched on the same day as the Opposition have arranged for a campaign paid for by NALGO on the self-same subject. Perhaps that is just a coincidence. The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand that problems—I am willing to acknowledge them—existed in that hospital before the trust was set up. My job was to decide whether the new trust management was more likely to solve those problems than the system that created them. That was my judgment. Since the hon. Gentleman knows that under Labour no more money will go to the NHS—his leader has told him so—what proposals can he make to improve the management?

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that 50,000 extra doctors and nurses are working in the NHS, compared with the position a decade ago, and that it would be ridiculous if the way in which staff are used did not change in response to clinical practice? Is it not regrettable that the situation in Bradford has been so distorted? Does not the creation of NHS trusts provide hospitals such as Bradford royal infirmary with the opportunity to use its resources in a way that puts patients first?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is right. In Bradford, as elsewhere, the shape of the NHS will undoubtedly change over the next 10 to 20 years. The pattern of hospital services will not remain exactly as it is now, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows. He is perfectly correct when he says that there are 60,000 more nurses; but there are also 16,000 more doctors and dentists than in 1979. I predict that the numbers will continue to rise. What is not certain and what would not necessarily be right would be if all those additional clinical people were in acute hospitals. They should be spread throughout the NHS to meet the needs of patients, not just the existing patterns of provision.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Will not the Secretary of State admit to yet another failed Tory experiment in Bradford? Will he explain why he has told the House today that there will be no cuts in patient care when the chief executive and the chairman of the trust have said publicly and in the press that there will be a 6 per cent. reduction in patient services? In the public consultation on the next trust to come before him, will the Secretary of State take account of the priority services rather than the lies which the management of the trust put forward last October?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is the duty of the district to provide comprehensive health care. It has made it perfectly clear that it has already placed contracts to meet local needs with that hospital, and other national health service hospitals. I hope that a considerable number of hospitals will seek trust status next year, because I am certain that that is the best way of managing hospitals.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Will my right hon. Friend re-emphasise that trusts are, and always will be, part of the national health service and that the money involved is, and will continue to be, part of the national health service? Does he recall saying in answer to me that all the NHS trusts would not report to their regions but would report to the centre? That being so, can he reassure the House and all the trusts in general that, if any of them should get into transitional problems, there is some provision whereby he has reserve powers?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with the first part of my hon. Friend's question. I have reserve powers, which I would use if a district told me that the comprehensive health care that it needed to supply was not available from the hospitals because of changes in supply patterns. My hon. Friend is perfectly right, in believing that we shall be monitoring the trusts very closely.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that I have an obligation to protect the business of the House. This is a private notice question—*[Interruption.]* Please hear me out. This is a private notice question that I would normally allow to run for about 20 minutes or perhaps for a

maximum of half an hour, but, in view of the great interest in this matter, and taking into account the subsequent business, exceptionally, I shall allow questions to run until 4.15 pm and then we must move on. If hon. Members ask brief questions, I hope that I shall be able to call most, if not all, of them.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Secretary of State recall how often he was warned in meetings, Adjournment debates and parliamentary questions that the trusts were set up in my borough and other parts of the west midlands in the face of overwhelming opposition? Can he say whether job losses will occur in the trusts that were set up in the borough? Is he aware that the miserable and dishonest way in which the Government are treating the health service will do as much damage to the Tory party and the Government as the poll tax has done? They are both products of prejudice and party dogma.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are told in the *Evening Standard* today that internal documents of the Labour party show that nobody believes its pledges on the national health service. That is entirely true and has been emphasised by what the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday. The Opposition will provide no more money. We have increased the money available to the NHS faster than they did, and are addressing the real management problems.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Does my right hon. Friend agree that none of us can determine whether any hospital is correctly manned without an analysis of the staffing needs of that hospital in relation to its detailed health objectives? I can well understand that my right hon. Friend does not normally wish such figures to be published, but as two particular cases have been the subject of great public controversy, will he make them available to the Select Committee on Health, if not to the House?

Mr. Waldegrave: The proposals of the Guy's and Lewisham trust are for discussion with its staff and are far from finalised. I have no doubt that it would respond to the Select Committee as my Department would.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): What guarantees can the Secretary of State offer that essential services and the quality of care will be maintained at Guy's and Lewisham hospitals? Will provision be protected for particularly vulnerable categories such as geriatric patients and mentally ill people?

Mr. Waldegrave: I can guarantee that the quality of Guy's work will be the same as it always has been. On behalf of the district and the hon. Lady's constituents, we must protect comprehensive health care, which will come from a variety of hospitals. It is the district health authority's duty to ensure that it has the necessary provision. That is the purpose of the health reforms, and that is right.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Has not the number of people working in the national health service increased fourfold in its lifetime, while the number of patients treated has only doubled? Does not that suggest that there is a substantial amount of waste and bureaucracy in the NHS, that there probably always has been, and that it has been getting worse recently, at least partly because of the Government's generosity in funding it?

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures at least show that those who believe that they can maintain and improve health care with fewer staff are likely to be telling the truth, and they are likely to know more than some of the amateur experts in the House.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will the Secretary of State answer the specific point that has been made more than once? All weekend we have had to listen to the right hon. Gentleman assuring us that cutting 600 jobs at Guy's will not affect the service. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) quoted specifically from an internal management document, which said that acute and mental services at Guy's will suffer. Who is right—Guy's management, or the Secretary of State?

Mr. Waldegrave: Guy's services must be of the highest quality. District purchasers must have a comprehensive range of services from Guy's, "Tommy's" and other hospitals. As a result of the system that the hon. Lady seems to support—I am surprised by that—hospitals are overstretched, none of them is providing a service of the quality necessary, and staff are highly demoralised.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): On the specific point of job losses, will my right hon. Friend compare the position of Marks and Spencer, which provides necessities such as clothing and food, with that of hospitals? Does he agree that customer satisfaction in Marks and Spencer will not be shaken as a result of its unfortunate announcement today? Had there not been so much second-guessing by politicians on day-to-day hospital management, the announcement would not have received such a bad and unfair reception from Opposition Members.

Mr. Waldegrave: The national health service is in a more privileged position than Marks and Spencer: it has a guaranteed real terms increase in funding for this financial year, which is more than any shop, however grand, can guarantee. However, good managements must try to spend money where it is necessary—on patients—and if that can be achieved with fewer people so that more money is ploughed back into patient care, that is surely right.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Does the Secretary of State understand that there is a crisis of confidence in the basis of trusts? How can he convince my constituents in one of the poorest parts of Manchester—their hospital has opted out and every health indicator shows that their health and health care are worse than elsewhere—that the provision of services will continue and that they will not face cuts and a diminution in services? Why should we believe him?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows his constituency extremely well. The best way of meeting the health needs of his constituents may be an expansion not of acute care but of community medicine. We cannot say that the only important NHS provision is acute hospitals, but I can reassure him that the trust in Manchester will continue, like other trusts, to offer patients a first-rate service.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the annoyance and anger felt in the past by most, if not all, Members of Parliament for Hertfordshire about the unfair distribution of finance within the North West Thames region between the shires and London? We have 41 per cent. of the population but

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receive only 33 per cent. of the money. That has led to ward closures, and is caused by overmanning, shroud waving and expensive operations in London. At last, we are moving towards equal treatment and the same cost per operation. Anyone who complains has no idea about value for money and does not care about my constituents.

Mr. Waldegrave: The first report that analysed the unfair share of hospital services in London was produced in 1905. Partly because of political pressures, it was never tackled. Anyone who knows anything about the health service will welcome the fact that, at last, we are beginning to match hospital services to where people live now and not where people lived in 1905.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the Secretary of State recognise that the first decision in the first week by the three NHS trusts formed in Newcastle was to increase the salaries of the top managers by substantial and secret amounts? Does he recognise that the fourth trust application, launched today in Newcastle, for the Royal Victoria infirmary involved not only an important community hospital but a major centre of medical and dental education in England and a major centre of children's health services in England? Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that that part of the business plan that refers to the future of medical and dental education and its financing and that part of the application that concerns children's health will be made known to the people of Newcastle?

Mr. Waldegrave: Those vital services will prosper better under the clearer and more accountable management of a trust than they ever did under the previous system. That will be true of all services in the hon. Gentleman's city, as it is of services in other cities.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): In the face of the sustained political attack on health trusts by the Labour party, there is great confidence in the management and structure of the Kingston health trust. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, following the television interview yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition, the public must appreciate that what the Labour party says about health is just words and more words and provides nothing tangible?

Mr. Waldegrave: Although I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's first point, the position is worse, in that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has given a range of spending pledges—from minimum wages to no-fault compensation—which would cost hundreds of millions or perhaps billions of pounds. Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition shot all those pledges out of the air. Therefore, those spending pledges will have to be financed out of patient care, because there is no other way to finance them.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Is the Secretary of State aware of the announcement about Leeds general infirmary that there will be £5 million cuts this year and £10 million cuts in the medium term? Is he aware also that it was made plain in the bid document that, if the budget did not balance, there would be reductions in services, staff or wages? What advice did the auditors' report give the right hon. Gentleman, and which of those actions did he sanction? Will he publish that report? Will the trusts be publicly accountable for their budgets before we are any further into this financial year?

Mr. Waldegrave: There was no auditors' report. The hon. Gentleman knows that in his hospital, as in others, there have been lurches from crisis to crisis. Is it not better that hospitals should manage their affairs to match income with expenditure so that there are no crisis cuts? Once again, I say to the hon. Gentleman that the district is perfectly satisfied that it can purchase on behalf of its people the comprehensive health care that is needed in his city.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I warmly support my right hon. Friend's policy. Will he take time, in the cause of accuracy and truth, to remind the BBC that, when describing hospital trusts, it should be aware that they are not hospitals that have opted out of the national health service?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. It is worth reaffirming the position, particularly as leaflets still being circulated in the Labour party's name refer to hospitals opting out of the NHS. That is not true, and the Labour party knows it. I am sorry if the BBC slipped into using that language; it was an uncharacteristic mistake.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): One hospital that should not be affected by any changes in patterns of health care referral is the famous Christie hospital trust, in my constituency, which is a centre of national and regional excellence. Will the Secretary of State allay public anxiety which was raised by the fact that before the trust was even formed the hospital could not afford drugs essential for cancer care? Will he confirm that the trust will not be one of those with financial problems, that there will be no job losses, and that in future all patients can be referred to the hospital and will receive all the health care prescribed by consultants so that the public who require such excellence of cancer health care may be assured about the future?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the future of Christie hospital is assured and he also knows—or he should know—that the story of the drugs to which he referred was a little more complicated than he thought when he launched into it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that questions to the Secretary of State may be tabled tomorrow for answer in a fortnight. Furthermore, I shall keep carefully in mind those hon. Members who have not been called today in order to give them precedence when we return to this issue.

Orders of the Day

School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (No. 2) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that hon. Members who want to raise points of order do not wish to complain because they were not called on the private notice question.

I have an obligation to protect the business of the House, and I shall have to put a 10-minute limit on speeches.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You referred at the outset to the importance of the subject when you said that you would allow questions to run until 4.15 pm. May I gently draw it to your attention that you did not call one hon. Member from one of the most impoverished regions in England —Merseyside? Do you think that that was fair?

Mr. Speaker: I was not aware that any hospital trusts were closing on Merseyside. If I am wrong, I am sorry, but I was not aware of it. I have called all those hon. Members who I thought had a direct interest, and I regret if I missed the hon. Gentleman, but I shall bear him in mind in the future.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any intimation from the Home Secretary that he intends to make a statement banning one of the world's most odious men—General Pinochet—from visiting this country to take part in an arms exhibition? You must be aware that thousands of people have sought refuge in this country from his regime of terror who lost relatives in the secret prisons and torture chambers under his fascist regime.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such intimation, but the hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I am sure that it will have been heard by those responsible.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Further to the point of order made by the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans). Were you not aware, Mr. Speaker, that not only do my hon. Friend and I have in our constituencies the most underfunded hospital trusts, but that our mental hospital and its grounds were sold while the patients were still in it? It is not fair if you do not recognise that Merseyside—and especially St. Helens—has the biggest problems.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that many hospitals have problems, especially the one to which the hon. Gentleman referred. However, he must find other ways to raise the issue.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I fully understand that you did not call me, Mr. Speaker, because it was the English Health Secretary who was making a statement. In Scotland, we are a year behind. Proposals have just been introduced in Ayrshire, against the wishes of all the consultants, by an unelected group of people. In Scotland we want to ensure that we learn from the English disasters as England did not learn from the Scottish poll tax disaster. If I apply for an Adjournment debate, will you consider my application sympathetically?

Mr. Speaker: I always look sympathetically at the hon. Gentleman's requests, but not at bogus points of order.

Many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, and I shall put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock. I hope that hon. Members who are called before 6 o'clock will take that into account to enable me possibly to relax that limit. I should like to call all hon. Members who are anxious to participate.

I have selected the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I look forward to producing before the House many proposals on the education service, but it is extremely unlikely that I shall introduce at any stage a more significant step than the proposal that we are discussing today. We are addressing the most vital thing of all in considering the quality of our education service. The quality of the education that we give young people in our schools depends above all on the quality of the teaching profession that provides it.

In the House, we can debate at great length the problems of the curriculum, of testing, and of buildings and equipment in schools. We can debate the qualifications they give and many other subjects. In the end, the real determinant of a good education system is that the teaching should be carried out by people who are good, dedicated and of the right intellectual quality, and who have the right commitment to the job. In an education service like our own state education service, the teaching staff need to be organised and respected as a profession. We all hope to see a teaching profession that cares for and enhances the professional values that it has sought to defend over the years.

I also realise that, to get the high-quality, well motivated and professional group of teachers, that we require, teachers need a fair level of remuneration to reward ability and good performance. They also need a worthwhile career structure to be developed for them, so that they can see a progression to the top of the profession in line with their achievements as their career goes on.

With the establishment of a review body to determine the pay and conditions of teachers, the Bill will pave the way for that aim, and it opens the period in which we shall see enhanced professionalism being encouraged among our teachers.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I may be anticipating my right hon. and learned Friend's remarks, but will the pay review body anticipate better rewards for heads and deputies who have such major responsibilities in schools? Above all, will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind as the Bill goes through the House, and in subsequent efforts, the fact that the career teacher in the classroom is the person who should be better rewarded

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commensurately than anyone else, and that he should be kept in the classroom and not constantly promoted out of it?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend touches on some extremely important points. I trust that, given its remit for pay, terms and conditions, the new review body will address itself not only to the overall level of remuneration of teachers but to the serious question of responsibility which my hon. Friend has raised. I hope that it will consider the question of proper differentials for headmasters and deputy heads, and for those who get to the top of the profession.

I agree strongly with my hon. Friend that, when one considers the profession at present, one realises that it is the really successful classroom teacher, whose performance in front of the class is good, who has the best claim of all in remuneration and reward. I agree that, in the teaching profession, as in others, it is quite important that we cater for those who know that their personal talents lie above all in teaching in front of a class and who know that that is the way in which they would prefer to pursue their career to the day of their retirement.

It cannot be right in teaching, any more than it is in nursing, in medicine or in a number of other professions, that to get to the top of the profession, one has to give up the vocation that has attracted one to the profession, and that one has to go into the realms of management. An excellent classroom teacher may not have the same abilities for that and may get considerably less satisfaction from it.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will move on a little.

The review body will have to address the matters to which I have referred to get the right answers on pay, terms and conditions. As I have made clear, it is equally important that it should produce an atmosphere in determining those matters which will enhance the professionalism of teaching.

In aid of that argument, I point to our experience with the other review bodies. They have produced a fair level of remuneration for the professions they cover, and they have also reinforced the professionalism of those professions. We have well established review bodies for doctors and dentists. Moreover, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, he established a new review body for nurses and midwives, which has transformed the atmosphere in which pay and conditions are determined—as compared with that which prevailed under the Whitley system—and enhanced professionalism. We may not yet have reached the levels of remuneration which all nurses would wish, but their pay and conditions have certainly been transformed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield may have noted a public comment last week by the current general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, Miss Christine Hancock, who is a formidable advocate of the interests of nurses within the health service—sometimes against the Government—who commended the notion of a review body to her fellow professionals in the teaching profession, saying that, in her opinion, the system had transformed the position of nurses.

The Royal College of Nursing shares with the Professional Association of Teachers a commitment not to take industrial action and a desire for matters to be settled in a professional way, away from the world of industrial action. I believe that many teachers share the view of many nurses that that is the right direction in which to go.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State realise that the way things have turned out has caused a great deal of confusion not merely among Conservative and Labour Members but in his own mind? The Government promised to give negotiating rights back to teachers. The matter was taken up by the International Labour Organisation of the United Nations, and finally agreed. The first School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill went through Committee and everyone awaited its implementation. Why did the Secretary of State suddenly change his mind at that stage? Does it not show a degree of chaos among the Government that they can go so far and then change their mind just like that?

Mr. Clarke: There is great clarity of purpose among Conservative Members. As I shall seek to show in a moment, the confusion continues to lie with the Labour party. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) asks a fair question, although his recollection of recent events seems to be at fault. It almost sounded as though he had welcomed the original Bill, but I do not believe he did. Complaints were made to the ILO—if not with the hon. Gentleman's support, certainly with that of one of the unions with which he is closely associated—claiming that the Bill that the Government have now withdrawn——

Mr. Flannery: Oh.

Mr. Clarke: Clearly, with hindsight, the hon. Gentleman begins to find qualities in it. I hope that he will be persuaded, however, that the present Bill represents an improvement.

In July last year, we brought forward proposals for the new machinery contained in the Bill that completed its Committee stage. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, introduced those proposals after the Government had anxiously considered what we should do next, following the long period after 1987 when we had failed to reach agreement with the teaching profession on how to move away from the interim advisory committee and sort out teachers' pay, terms and conditions. At that time, my right hon. Friend was quite attracted by the idea of a review body, as were quite a large number of members of the Government but the concept was heartily opposed by many teachers, and there was still more than a suggestion of industrial militancy in the air.

As we proceeded, it became clear that circumstances had changed significantly. I remind the hon. Member for Hillsborough and others that, while we were preparing for a return to a system of negotiations with a Government override, the six trade unions concerned were finding it impossible to agree on the allocation of seats on the employees' side of the committee. That was an extremely bad omen when it came to looking forward to the smooth progress of negotiations. Two of the trade unions were in

conflict with the other four about the status of the sub-committee that was to be established for head teachers and deputies. Conservative Members on the Standing Committee were divided on that subject, and the trade unions certainly were.

In my opinion, it became ever clearer that large numbers of members of the teaching profession did not relish going back to collective bargaining—certainly if it were to be accompanied by industrial action of a kind which, in my opinion, a minority of the members of one large trade union still hanker after. This was underlined at the teachers' Easter conferences. A faction of the National Union of Teachers, who had got hold of the hall in whatever seaside town they were ensconced, passed all kinds of wild motions. These were disowned as much as possible by their own executive, as it knew that the teaching profession outside did not want this kind of return to industrial action.

The situation today is different from that which prevailed last July. Now, five of the six teaching trade unions support the notion of a review body. Some have been campaigning for it. Indeed, I believe that the opposition within the NUT is more muted than some of its militants would wish.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): The information that the Secretary of State has just given the House is simply untrue. The fact is that he received from the teachers' organisations a letter telling him the number of seats that each union had agreed should represent teachers on the negotiating body. I received a copy of that letter. It is not true to say that teachers could not agree among themselves.

Mr. Clarke: I shall certainly search for that letter. My hon. Friend the Minister of State tells me that we certainly had not reached that stage by the end of the Committee's deliberations. Certainly, the contents of the letter were not communicated to me personally. My understanding is that teachers had not so agreed.

There were all the warning signs of the dangers of going back to the difficulties of Burnham. Members of this House have sat on Burnham committees—some representing the employers, and some the employees. Those who remember Burnham may recall that on only three occasions in 20 years did that machinery result in a negotiated agreement between employees and employers. I believe that the preparations for the new negotiating process had begun to show all the warning signs of its being unlikely to produce easy agreement on either structure or progress, and of its being inferior, as a means of going about the settlement of teachers' pay, to the review body process that I now advocate.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I must press the Secretary of State on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg). I see that the answer is coming straight from the officials' Box. I shall continue while the Secretary of State attempts to read the official's writing. Was the Secretary of State accurate when, a moment ago, he claimed that the trade unions had been unable to agree about composition? On this point, there is complete disagreement between the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend.

Mr. Clarke: I am glad that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), like me, needs a little reminding of the exact situation. The Professional Association of Teachers and the Secondary Heads Association were in disagreement with the other unions on the number of seats that each union should have on the negotiating committee. In addition, the Secondary Heads Association was in disagreement with the others on the number of votes that each union should have. All they had done was reach agreement in principle on counting relevant numbers of members as part of the negotiations. I do not think that there is agreement about the number of relevant members that each of them claims. Those who guard my correspondence continue to share my view that two unions still disagreed with the other four on the number of seats on the bargaining council, and one union disagreed with the others on the number of votes. I have already reminded the House of the history of Burnham. We were in serious danger of going back down that road.

I have described all the circumstances that have changed since the summer of last year. For some time now, the Government have been contemplating this change. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, on taking office and previously, underlined his personal commitment to tackling the problem of the morale of teachers—raising the self-esteem of the profession—and addressing questions of professional status. The Prime Minister's commitment underlines the change between the proposals that were before the House and the review body to which we are now committed.

Mr. Straw: A report appeared in *The Times Educational Supplement* on Friday—as far as I am aware, no disclaimer has been issued by the Department—that, in the course of an interview, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that, when the present Prime Minister was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had opposed a pay review body. Is that correct?

Mr. Clarke: I was not involved in the discussions with the Treasury last summer, so the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that I have no idea. I know that, in discussions to which I was party, during the summer of 1990, the Government agreed to put forward the proposals that took the form of the Bill. As I have recounted, matters moved on. My right hon. Friend who is now the Prime Minister was firmly of the intent to raise the status of the profession and to consider again remuneration within it. That was the position at the end of last year. The Government have decided to introduce the Bill and to recommend a review body, for the reasons that I have set out.

As we are clearly set on that course, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has the opportunity to clarify the Labour party's reaction and its preference. I have been comparing the so-called reasoned amendment with the hon. Gentleman's first response on behalf of the Labour party when I made my announcement on 17 April. Most of those who are in the Chamber will remember his outrage and indignation when he leapt to his feet in response to my statement. He sought passionately to defend teachers' right to strike. He opposed root and branch the proposals that have now become the Bill, because he claimed that they went behind the principles of collective bargaining and the right to industrial action. He thought that important principles were being undermined, to the disadvantage of teachers.

[Mr. Clarke]

The hon. Gentleman's reaction should not have surprised me as much as it did. The Labour party's attitude towards the public services has been dominated by its approach to industrial action. It is my recollection that, for as long as I have been a Member of this place, the Labour party has always supported every strike or every example of industrial action that has been taken by any group of public service workers against a Conservative Government. When the Labour party is in opposition, it supports each and every strike by teachers, hospital workers or whoever. When the party is in government, however, it gives in to them—sometimes with good grace and sometimes with bad, sometimes quickly and sometimes after a winter of discontent, but in the end, they always give in to them.

The Labour party's approach to these matters is best epitomised by the fact that the Chamber usually fills when there is a threat in the air of "good" industrial action by the public service. The Chamber was more crowded than I have seen it for many a long year for exchanges on the health service because the National Union of Public Employees was worried about redundancies at over-manned hospitals in both London and Bradford. No question of patient health ever brings Labour Members to the Chamber in such numbers.

As the Labour party is usually committed to the right to strike, it seems that the reasoned amendment moves away a little from that approach, although not too far. The reasoned amendment tries slightly to alter the tone; it does not refer to the right to strike. I hope that that means that the Opposition accept that industrial action against pupils is something to which groups of teachers should never have recourse. I trust that that will be underlined with clarity today.

The Government are proceeding with the appointment of a review body on the basis that it will bring an end to industrial action in our classrooms. If industrial action were to be taken, or to be threatened, on the pay or terms of conditions of teachers within the remit of the review body, there would be no commencement order under the Bill, and the interim advisory committee would have to continue in existence for some time, and for some considerable time more, until common sense prevailed.

The reasoned amendment goes to other matters. Perhaps I pay the amendment a bit of a compliment by describing it as reasoned. I am not sure whether its contents contain much rhyme or reason when they are related to the principal subject matter of the Bill. On 17 April, I asked the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and his colleague the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) whether the Labour party was in favour of or against establishing a pay review body for teachers. That may have been a difficult question on 17 April, but it should now be capable of an answer. There is no such answer in the reasoned amendment. That minor detail of the Bill is not referred to by the Opposition.

The reasoned amendment criticises the Government for "failing to meet its own deadline to restore pay settlement machinery by 1990".
Does the Labour party remain in favour of restoring collective bargaining? Is the Labour party lined up against five out of six of the teaching unions and also against the silent majority of the NUT in wanting to return to Burnham and not have a review body? Anything else that the hon. Member for Blackburn may say on this subject will be beside the point if he attempts once again to discuss the matter without telling us whether Labour favours a review body.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I completely support the proposals of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and his comments about strikes. However, does he agree that pay review bodies are a better and more important defence for groups which typically do not have political clout and do not go on strike? In a recent written answer to me, it was revealed that university teachers have not received a real pay increase for more than 20 years. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is possible and certainly desirable to set up a similar pay review body for university staff as well?

Mr. Clarke: I will probably have an opportunity on another occasion to debate with my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) whether university lecturers have received a real pay rise in the past 20 years. Their real-terms pay is now considerably higher than it was when this Government came to office.

As a former university teacher, my hon. Friend asks his question at a singularly inapposite time. The Association of University Teachers is at the moment balloting its members on whether they should take industrial action in support of their pay claim, and no doubt the Labour party would egg them on. However, my hon. Friend is right: those who take such industrial action tend to be less successful than those who have a review body.

The Government have established review bodies for only a comparatively small and discrete number of professions affecting a large number of people because of the particular role of those professions in delivering a particular service. There are other non-striking professional groups in the health service and others in local government, central Government and elsewhere. The Government have identified doctors with dentists and nurses with midwives and also parts of the judiciary and the armed forces, and we have resolutely said that review bodies should not automatically extend beyond those groups.

The teaching profession is at the heart of providing a service intended to raise educational standards of people of statutory age. I am certain that many other groups will envy the review body status that we are giving schoolteachers. Many other groups would prefer to have their pay settled in that way. I regret to say that the reply to most of them will be that the Government cannot contemplate their claims. It is only because of the particular status of school teaching and the Government's particular desire to enhance the status of schoolteachers vis-a-vis the general population that we are prepared to establish a review body for that group and not to contemplate applications to extend the principle to any other group.

The AUT has strayed off side, at least with regard to this Government if not with regard to the Opposition, by balloting on strike action. Perhaps by contemplating strike action, the union believes that it will cause the Labour party to look favourably upon it.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has referred to the critical importance of schoolteachers in delivering

skills and the basic education required in a modern economy. However, I should have thought that those in higher education, particularly those in universities, play just as important a role in terms of a modern economy. As the central point for the support of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers for my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals was that the

"very question of industrial action would recede into the mists of history"

does my right hon. and learned Friend not realise that there is an unfortunate trend in higher education in that we are constantly talking about industrial action? Would not a review body for higher education ensure that industrial action would recede into the mists of history? My right hon. and learned Friend should ask the Opposition whether they favour review bodies for higher education. One suspects that they do.

Mr. Clarke: The Labour party's view on such matters usually depends on what the trade unions recommend. The Opposition become a little baffled when five trade unions out of six are prepared to accept a no industrial action agreement, but that normally does not arise and, so far as I am aware, it does not arise with regard to the AUT.

For some years now, the Government have resisted applications for review bodies from many different groups. Many people would advocate giving up collective bargaining and industrial action if they could have review body status. By its very nature, review body status must be selective. It would not be possible to finance and manage public services if the vast majority of public servants had their status determined by review bodies. I believe that two thirds of the civil service would happily settle tomorrow for review body status governing their pay.

The professions that have been granted review body status including doctors and dentists by a previous Government, nurses and midwives by this Government and the armed forces——

Mr. Straw: What about Members of Parliament?

Mr. Clarke: We had a Members' review body, but it was never followed and we have now abandoned it. Hon. Members are not held in such high regard by the public or even by themselves, it would seem, judging by voting patterns on Members' salaries. Only a small and select group of professions have their pay determined by review bodies and it is my duty to resist any applications to extend it.

What is the Labour party's view about a review body? That is the only unanswered question today. The public are in favour of the Government's recommendation, as are the vast majority of teachers. There is no serious question mark left over the proposal except why on earth the Opposition cannot bring themselves to support it without hesitation or conditions.

Mr. Steinberg: The Secretary of State has made much play of no industrial action. Is the pay review body to be imposed or granted on the condition that there will be no industrial action? Will that be written into the legislation? I can see no reference to that in the Bill, and if it is not written into the Bill, how is he going to enforce it?

Mr. Clarke: The intention to set up a review body is on condition that there is no industrial action with regard to matters within the remit of the review body. The condition is not in the Bill and I am not going to be bogged down in the internal procedures of trade unions by asking them to send me letters to confirm such conditions. The best way to judge matters is by their actions.

When the Bill has received its Second Reading, passed through its parliamentary stages and received Royal Assent, we will hear no more about industrial action from any section of the teaching profession. We will have rendered it extinct. We are proceeding on condition of no industrial action, and obviously, circumstances would change so far as the Government are concerned if industrial action was taken or threatened again.

We are following a perfectly good precedent. I worked with my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield when he established the review body for nurses and midwives. We had exactly the same discussions. We would never have convinced the Confederation of Health Service Employees or the National Union of Public Employees to sign a no-strike agreement. They would have been drummed out of the brownies by the Labour movement if they had signed one, and they would have been expelled from the Trades Union Congress and disowned at Labour party conferences.

My right hon. Friend, supported by myself and the Government, set up a review body and declared it to be on the basis that there was to be no industrial action. We have not heard a word from any section of the nursing profession about industrial action from that day to this. The Royal College of Nursing has actually grown in strength, because the basis on which that profession proceeds is that industrial action is out of the question for nurses who deal with patients.

That, in my opinion, is the atmosphere inside the teaching profession as well. Five unions, as it happens, will tell us—and will even sign it—that they will not take industrial action again. The sixth, in practice, I guarantee will follow that pattern exactly. However, if industrial action were ever taken or threatened, the review body basis for setting their pay would be off. How could we face the AUT? Its members might even be prepared to give up industrial action if they were offered review body status, which is much coveted by public sector employees.

Clause 1 sets up the review body. One controversial point in it for the hon. Member for Blackburn is that it gives the Secretary of State power to give directions to the review body. That is described in his reasoned amendment as unacceptable. He will probably start drawing comparisons between this and the financial remit which used to be given to the interim advisory committee before it produced its four reports.

It is not a power to set a financial remit of that kind. It actually sets out in statutory form the power of the Secretary of State to tell the review body to have regard to affordability and the need to recruit and retain people of adequate motivation. It exists in the Bill because that direction or request is given by the Government to the other review bodies. They are non-statutory review bodies, so the power to give that kind of guidance must be put in statute on the face of the Bill. It is on all fours with the other review bodies, and does not justify the Opposition's complaint in their reasoned amendment.

Clause 1 also underlines the fact that appointment to the review body should be made by the Prime Minister, and that the review body will report to the Prime Minister. That is an important difference between the review body and the interim advisory committee. Great stress was

[Mr. Clarke]

always placed upon that to me by representatives of the medical profession. Doctors and dentists insisted that, if they were to have that arrangement, it was to be an independent body set up by the head of the Government—the Prime Minister—that it should report to the Prime Minister, and that the Prime Minister should preside over the decision taken in the light of the review body's recommendations.

Clause 2 covers the making of orders in the light of the review body's recommendations, and provides for some consultation with local authorities and with other employers and trade unions before making those orders. That gives me the opportunity of repeating what I have said before, as is always said in respect of other review bodies—that the Government will be committed to implementing the recommendations of the review body unless there are clear and compelling reasons to the contrary.

Clause 3 has only one feature of interest to the House, which is that it allows grant-maintained schools not to be bound by the orders that follow the review body recommendation if they so wish. I very much doubt whether many grant-maintained schools will choose to settle their own pay and conditions in a hurry. My advice to them would be to go cautiously. They are small units, and they work within the same financial envelope as other schools. I do not expect that many grant-maintained schools will set themselves up as totally autonomous negotiating bodies, working out wholly separate levels of pay for their staff.

However, they would be well advised, as time goes on, after consultation with their own teachers, to consider the prospects of making variations, opting for additional payments for particular local patterns of work, perhaps additional payments for longer school hours of the kind that city technology colleges work, perhaps some payments for extra-curricular activities that are beyond those that we normally expect a teacher to engage in, and so on. I advise grant-maintained schools with some care to contemplate using as a management tool, in the best sense of those words, the provision in clause 3 which would enable them to opt out, and therefore to vary the terms and conditions of their staff.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): On opting out, in view of the caution that the Secretary of State has expressed and the obvious impact that it may have elsewhere, why has he given himself no discretion to consider whether such a proposal is satisfactory? When a proposal is made to him, under the terms of the Bill he is compelled to accept it, even if he feels that there are strong reasons why it should be referred back.

Mr. Clarke: I do not think that that is necessary. We have taken on board the point that was strongly urged on my hon. Friend the Minister of State in Standing Committee. This Bill, unlike the former one, gives grant-maintained schools the ability to opt out of national arrangements if they wish, but it stipulates that they should do so only after consultation with their own staff —their own teachers. That is some caution against a school suddenly doing something that is in nobody's interests in the locality concerned.

The Bill finally makes provision that it will come into force by order. I have already made it clear that that commencement order would not be made if threats of industrial action are made by those who would otherwise be covered by the arrangements.

I commend the Bill to the House. Of course, it leaves in the minds of most schoolteachers in particular, I should imagine, one large unanswered question: exactly what levels of pay and remuneration for the teaching profession will emerge as a result of this new machinery, which we hope to have in place in time to determine the settlement for April of next year? Of course we have no means of knowing. It is the essence of this machinery that we are setting up an independent body that will give advice to the Government in the light of all the evidence that it gets.

Undoubtedly, my duty on behalf of the Government will be to preside over the giving of evidence to the review body, which will stress the advances that have been made by teachers in recent years, stress the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, talk about the need to concentrate principally on the need to recruit and retain people of the right ability, and so on. Employers and trade unions may submit evidence that has a strikingly different emphasis on what should determine pay for next year and beyond. At the end of that process, the review body will determine matters objectively.

I can only point to the history of what has happened to review body groups compared with other public sector workers in recent years. Some quite good tables have been produced. I use ones by the Treasury, but the BBC commissioned some that came to the same conclusion recently, showing what has happened to various groups and public sector workers over the 10 years of this Government's existence compared with the economy as a whole.

Two groups of public servants stand out above any others in terms of increases in their earnings. They are, first, nurses and midwives and, secondly, doctors and dentists. When one says that, people tend to say, "You have forgotten the police force. Surely the police force has had a big percentage increase in its earnings." It is fourth in the table. Doctors and nurses are well ahead.

The missing third are schoolteachers, who have not done as badly over the past 10 years as many of them or as some of the public sometimes believe. The rest of the public service comes nowhere—going down the table below. I believe that that reflects the respect that university teachers—*[Interruption.]* I am glad to say that university teachers do not appear on my copious list of examples.

In addition to having done better than other groups, the review bodies have one other marked success to chalk up when one considers how those professions have been compared since they have had review bodies, compared with the past and other groups. The review body system has tended to ensure a steady progression in the pay of the professions. The history of the pay of nurses, doctors, teachers and many others shows a pattern of progression which shows that, after something of a hiccup of a dramatic increase—a Halsbury, a Clegg, or something of that kind—a decline takes place while tensions build, and then there is another big hiccup when another big increase comes along.

One of the advantages of a review body is that it tends to produce a smoother line because, year in and year out, the same review body takes an independent look at the right level of settlement. I happily submit the Government

to that. We need an independent body for schoolteachers which will tell us what the levels of pay need to be in the light of affordability and the need to recruit and retain good people.

We shall implement the recommendations unless there are clear and compelling reasons why we should not. By doing that, I believe that we shall forge a new relationship between the Government and our teachers. We shall be giving teachers the professional status that they deserve. They will be in the ranks of genuine professionals and treated like other professionals as far as remuneration and terms and conditions are concerned. They will be rewarded for the professional dedication they show towards their pupils.

A society that treats the occupation of teaching children with that kind of respect is a society that shows that it is treating the educational standards of its children with the same proper respect. That is the attitude towards educational standards and the teaching profession which the Prime Minister proposes that his Government should take and which the Government are determined to take in the interests of achieving the education service that we all want. I commend the Bill to the House.

5 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which gives unacceptable powers to the Secretary of State to issue directions to the Pay Review Body, undermining its independence of judgement; which contains no proposals to raise teachers' professionalism by the establishment of a General Teachers' Council; which makes clear that Her Majesty's Government has broken faith with the profession by failing to meet its own deadline to restore pay settlement machinery by 1990 and has broken faith with honourable and Right honourable Members by giving explanations as to the reasons for the delay in securing a Report stage of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill which were disingenous; and because the policies of Her Majesty's Government have led to a serious decline in the morale, motivation, recruitment and retention of teachers, and in their relative pay.

I begin with a quotation:

"There is a crisis of confidence amongst teachers of such growing magnitude that it now threatens the entire spectrum of the Government's educational reforms.

So marked is the decline of status, and self-esteem of the teaching profession, that unless the Conservative Government address the root causes of this problem:

The educational system as a whole will face a prolonged period of steady deterioration. The Government will, ultimately, and sooner rather than later, be forced to compromise on the implementation of its recent reforms . . . From all sides the Conservative Government is being assailed and challenged on its education reforms and for failing the Nation's children, parents and teachers."

That quotation comes from the Carlton Club paper, which is marked "strictly private and confidential"—I am not surprised about that—and which is headed "Education in the 1990s—A Current Assessment—Requirements for the Manifesto". It is based upon what is described as an "investigative seminar" which was called by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and attended by the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and by the Secretary of State's special adviser. The paper contains admission after admission by leading Conservative education policy makers about the parlous state of our education service. It provides a much more accurate backdrop for today's debate than the claims that were made earlier in the debate by the Secretary of State.

There is certainly a deep crisis of confidence among teachers. The first question to ask is why there is such a crisis. It is widely agreed that in no other period—certainly not in this century—has the morale and self-esteem of the teaching profession, and its standing in the eyes of the public, been lower. Part of the explanation for that crisis of confidence is simple and relates to pay. As last April's report of the Select Committee on Education and Science showed, there has been no real-terms increase in teachers' pay since 1987. More importantly, teachers' pay relative to that of other non-manual workers has been declining consistently since 1974, with the hiccups to which the Secretary of State referred, and is still falling further and further behind. As the Secretary of State acknowledged, those differences are particularly marked for those whose career ambition is to teach rather than to administer. I am glad to hear that the Secretary of State now regards as his overwhelming priority the proper rewarding of those who make a career out of teaching, not out of administration.

The Secretary of State commented on my remarks about the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions following his statement on 17 April, and said that I had commended its work. I have commended the work of the IAC which, among other things, has made some pertinent remarks about teachers' morale. However, one of the truths about the IAC is that, because of the constraints on its terms of reference, and despite its best judgments, it has not been able to secure a single percentage increase in teachers' real pay.

Although the decline in teachers' relative pay is important in explaining the decline in morale, it has served to reinforce—and has been reinforced by—two other things. The first is the long-standing anti-intellectual, anti-education culture that has been so marked in England, but not in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, for a century or more. I have always found Bernard Shaw's jibe, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach" depressing not only because he said it, but because it has had such resonance across society and down the generations.

No blame directly attaches to the Government for that anti-intellectual and anti-education culture in our society, but blame does attach to them for the fact that, over the past 12 years, they have made the climate in which teachers have to work so much more difficult. They have constantly demeaned and diminished the value of teachers and the value placed on them by society. There are plenty of illustrations of that, such as the national curriculum.

There was no consultation in 1987 with the people who would have to put the national curriculum into practice. A so-called "consultative document" was issued three months after the general election. Comments were invited over a short period, but no notice was taken of what was said by the teachers' organisations or anybody else—not about whether the national curriculum was desirable, but simply about whether it would work. The consequence has been that it does not work and that, almost from the day when it was formally established, it has had to be unpicked. That lack of consultation led to what Prince Charles referred to last week as "innovation fatigue" as a result of half-baked measures being introduced and then retreated from.

There has been a similar saga on testing. Again, there has not been any proper consultation—not about whether there should be testing, but about how it should be operated effectively. The ludicrously complicated standard

[Mr. Jack Straw]

assessment tasks were piloted last year. Because proper note was not taken of the feelings of the profession on whether that weight of SATs would serve any purpose, the Secretary of State and the Minister of State now describe what was supposed to be the introduction of national testing as "national pilots". Have the Secretary of State and his colleagues ever stopped to think about how those constant changes—that "innovation fatigue"—have affected teachers' morale and their view of how they are regarded by Ministers?

Ministers have repeatedly insinuated that teachers cannot be trusted. I shall discuss the changes that have been made in the history and geography national curriculum orders later, but the Secretary of State must bear in mind that by suddenly and impetuously forcing on the profession changes for which no ground had been laid, he has challenged the professionalism and integrity of the history and geography teachers in our secondary schools. That is not only my view; it is the view of those teachers who feel bitter about the way in which they have been treated.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I hesitated to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's somewhat wild historical theories earlier, but I have been listening with amazement to his account of how the national curriculum and testing have been introduced without any consultation. He knows that the whole process is heavily laden with consultation. For the curriculum orders, for example, a working party is first set up to produce an interim report. That is published and excites a lot of comment. In the light of those comments, the working party then produces a final report, which is then passed to the National Curriculum Council, which consults on it before recommending draft orders to me. I produce the draft orders and we then consult upon them. In the light of that consultation, we make final orders, and those are what we are debating tonight.

Does the hon. Gentleman describe that as a process of non-consultation, which holds the teaching profession in contempt? There was an enormous amount of consultation, at the end of which the hon. Gentleman winds up arguing that, as Secretary of State, I should not make any changes. If he adopted his own procedures, he would find himself rubber-stamping an endless process of consultation built into the arrangements.

Mr. Straw: If the Secretary of State had listened carefully to what I was saying, he would know that I was referring to the way in which the national curriculum was constructed in the first place. He was not a Minister in the Department of Education and Science at the time, and neither were any of his colleagues. A consultative document was issued a month after the general election in July 1987, with a deadline of a few weeks for comments. Despite the fact that all the professional organisations submitted comments and said, for example, that key stage 4 would not work as the previous Secretary of State had planned, their comments were ignored.

All the efforts that we and the organisations made to try to get some sense into Ministers and to make them realise that the curriculum was being overloaded for 14-year-olds, were simply ignored. The integrity of the teaching profession was challenged not only by the history and geography orders that we shall debate later but by the way in which they were introduced. The Secretary of State gave the profession no notice of those changes, thereby suggesting that he lacked confidence in the profession.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is the reason that the hon. Gentleman has totally failed to address himself to the Bill that he has been totally deserted by his erstwhile troops? Is he aware of the letter from Nigel de Gruchy of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, in which he expresses strong support for today's proposals:

> "But hopefully with a fairer system than ever pertained in the past for determining teachers' pay and conditions, the profession will be left free to get on with the all-important job of teaching in the classroom and raising standards to the level everyone appears to want"—

with the sole exception of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Straw: I am well aware of that letter, and I shall deal with the attitude of teachers in a moment. I was speaking directly to the reasoned amendment that Mr. Speaker has been pleased to call, and I was saying why the Conservative party is so windy about the professionalism and morale of teachers, and why it has had to devote paragraph after paragraph in its draft manifesto scraping around for measures that might dig it out of the hole into which it has got its reputation on education.

One reason was the challenge to teachers' professionalism and the second is that teachers have a strong sense that Ministers regard the education service as one for other people's children and not for their own. This has everything to do with teachers' professionalism and their morale, because the Government have been leading the profession, or seeking to lead the education system for the past 12 years and, as the Carlton Club accepts, they have failed to do so.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) wrote a good pamphlet which was published by the Tory Reform Group in December, called "The Blocked Society". He said of Ministers and hon. Members, among others, in relation to the state education service:

> "They are neither in it nor of it. They patronise it in words . . . but not by attendance."

That is the truth.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not realise quite what a truth he was telling when he said of the Secretary of State that he patronised the state education service in words but not by attendance. I wonder whether the Secretary of State realises how damaging it is to his authority that, in six months as Secretary of State, he has spent less than one day visiting state schools. He may groan but, given his lack of a background in the state education service, as he is now the leader of state schools does he not think that it would have been a good idea to visit a few schools before pontificating about them?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I attended one for my education, unlike the hon. Gentleman, who attended a minor public school. The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 14 minutes. Is he in favour of a review body for teachers? He does not seem to wish to move towards that question.

Mr. Straw: I am coming to that. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have to wait his turn. I am making my speech in my own way.

Mr. Walden: I am grateful for the additional publicity that the hon. Gentleman has given to my pamphlet, but, no doubt inadvertently, he has quoted me completely out of context. When I said:

"They patronise it in words . . . but not by attendance",

I was not referring to Ministers, although in another part of the pamphlet I pointed out that Ministers make the choice of sending their children to private schools, as I do. The reason that I do so is so that my children will not be subjected to the egalitarian philosophy of teaching which has flooded the profession and for which the Opposition are responsible. I entirely understand the choice of any of my right hon. Friends in the Cabinet who behave in the same way. I got the impression that the hon. Gentleman was trying to drive a wedge between myself and the Front Bench. Therefore, I should like to say that I support my right hon. and learned Friend's measure today 100 per cent. It is courageous, energetic and imaginative, and exactly the sort of thing that I would expect from an imaginative and energetic Secretary of State.

Mr. Straw: I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman feels the need to retrieve his position. He opened the paragraph by saying:

"This Conservative Government does its best for the children of others",

Then he goes on to say:

"They are neither in it, nor of it".

In another paragraph, which will be in lots of Labour party pamphlets, it says:

"It used to be a cheap parliamentary jibe for Labour to ask why it was that so few Tory Ministers used the state schools. There was a time when there were answers, but there are no answers now, because the question has been subtly adjusted: when the Government claim that the state sector has changed out of all recognition as a result of their policies, why do Government ministers still steer clear of it? The only answer now is the truth, and the truth is scarcely sayable by any Government Minister."

That may be so, but the truth will certainly be "sayable" by us.

Mr. Clarke: The state system ought to attract many of those people who send their children to independent schools. What would make the state system more attractive, and what we ought to be agreeing on, would be if the enhanced professional status of teachers reduced the risk of strike action in state classrooms. That is why the hon. Gentleman should soon move on to say whether he is in favour of a review body, or whether he thinks it is more important that strike action should be kept open as a possibility in classrooms.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State is right about that, and I shall return to it in more detail. However, I can tell him something else that would make state education more attractive—if he did not come out with the sort of ludicrous statements that are quoted in *Woman*—*[Laughter.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman may think that it is a joke, but he is quoted as saying:

"I have never met anybody who did not wish to send their children into independent education if they could afford it."

Mr. Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment when I have finished the quote.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is quoting the *Daily Mirror*, a newspaper that only a buffoon would quote. The *Daily Mirror*, which is read by morons, produced that sentence. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the article in *Woman*, he will see the sentence that he quoted, followed by my saying that that is a sad state of affairs and that it is necessary to improve the state education system to stop that being the case.

Mr. Straw: He is very windy. As far as I understood it, the Secretary of State is admitting that he said it. He may have said something else as well, but he said:

"I have never met anybody who did not wish to send their children into independent education if they could afford it."

I do not know whether he approved it, but I know that he said it, and it happens not to be my experience. As even *The Northern Echo* pointed out today, the Secretary of State must live in a closed world if he thinks that everyone who sends their children into state education does so only because they cannot get them into private schools. That is an utter calumny, and it is insulting to all the good aspects of the state education service.

Of the attacks on the professionalism of teachers that I have described, perhaps the greatest of all was the unilateral withdrawal of teachers' negotiating rights in 1987. That deeply damaged teachers' self-esteem, as did the way in which Ministers have prevaricated over new negotiating machinery. On Second Reading of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill in December 1986, the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker)—referring to the power to grant extensions under the Bill—sought to make much of the fact that

"the advisory committee should be established on an interim basis only—until 1990".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 43.]

Not three years, but at least five years will have elapsed before any pay negotiating machinery can be restored to replace that of the interim advisory committee. That represents a breach of faith with the profession, and one for which teachers have not lightly forgiven the Government or the Secretary of State.

Restoring the morale of the teaching profession requires much more than new and agreed negotiating machinery, or even the sort of pre-election pay increase that no doubt the Secretary of State will have in mind if the election is delayed. It requires a Government with a real commitment to state education—a Government who honour and value teachers. That plainly does not apply to this Government. However, a proposal supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House would give a clear signal of the renewed importance attached to the teaching profession: the proposal for the establishment of a general teaching council. Such a council would hold a register of the profession, help to determine entry to and exit from the profession and give advice on a wide range of matters relating to supply and training.

The cost of establishing the council would be relatively low. It could be done easily if the will were there. It was backed by the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, chaired by the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton). I am sorry to say that the Secretary of State has not supported that proposal. To coin a phrase, he patronises the profession in words but not in deeds.

The Secretary of State keeps asking me whether the Labour party supports review bodies. I was intrigued that, just after he had asked me to give a "yes or no" answer to that question, he was posed a similar question by his hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins), and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson).

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): Friends?

Mr. Straw: Technically, at least, they are hon. Friends.

The Secretary of State was unable to give a "yes or no" answer, because the answer depends on the circumstances. Neither, as I recall, was he able to give a clear "yes or no" answer when he was being pressed to establish a review body for the ambulance personnel during their dispute 18 months ago.

The Labour party has long supported the establishment of independent review bodies when that is agreed between the parties. I referred to that—I am surprised that the Secretary of State has not quoted me—during the debate on teachers' pay and conditions on 6 June 1990, when we were dealing with the pay and conditions order for last year. We are sceptical about the proposals in the Bill. They do not seem to be consistent with a fully independent review body. That view is gaining increasing currency among those who the Secretary of State claims support the Bill. For example, the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association has said of the Government's proposals:

"we must seriously, and perhaps fundamentally, question their adequacy".

Dr. Hampson: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's remarks, because I scrutinised with care what he said on 17 April. He very carefully did not accept the principle of a review body for schoolteachers. Does he now accept the principle of a review body for schoolteachers and a review body for university teachers, whatever the specifics?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman read what I said on 17 April. If so, he ought to read it again. I have just explained that we are in favour of not only the principle but the practice of review bodies when they are agreed between the parties. We are sceptical about whether the proposals in the Bill will meet our requirement that the review body be independent.

Mr. Hampson *rose*——

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will hold on, I will explain that for him.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have some sympathy with the criticisms in the reasoned amendment. However, he is not being clear. If the reasoned amendment were passed and the Bill withdrawn, would he ask the Government to come back to the House —or would he do so himself—with a differently worded measure introducing a review body; or would he regard the opposition of one of the teachers' trade unions as a block, no matter how the review body was set up?

Mr. Straw: No. I would not regard that as a block for a moment. I would have sought proper consultation with the parties about the proposal. One of the truths about the proposal, as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) knows, is that consultation on review bodies was ruled out in the Green Paper published by the Government in 1987. The idea of a review body simply was not on the table from that day until the Secretary of State made his announcement on 17 April 1991.

As I said, AMMA, which supports the principle of a review body, has serious doubts about the practice of the proposed review body. I want to come to the part of the argument about the direction-making power in clause 1. As the Secretary of State made clear on 17 April, the usual procedure is for the Government first to establish its terms of reference, then to give evidence to the review body, including evidence on the economic circumstances that the Government think should be taken into account. The Government have a reserve position; they will accept the recommendations of the review body unless there are clear and compelling grounds for not doing so.

We accept that practice and would not depart from it. However, a question arises—why does the Secretary of State feel it necessary to include in the Bill powers of direction that do not exist for other review bodies, even in this non-statutory form? The wording of clause 1(4) is almost identical to the wording of section 2(4) of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987, which gave the Secretary of State substantial powers of direction to the interim advisory committee. Those powers were used, and were the principal reason why the interim advisory committee was unable to follow its own conclusions and recommend increases which it judged necessary to maintain recruitment, retention and morale.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): It said so.

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend said, it said so. In case the Secretary of State has missed it, section 2(4) of the 1987 Act says:

"The Secretary of State may give directions to the Committee with respect to matters referred to them as to considerations to which they are to have regard and financial or other constraints to which their recommendations are to be subject".

Clause 1(4) of the Bill says:

"With respect to matters referred to the review body by him, the Secretary of State may give directions to the review body as to considerations to which they are to have regard".

The only words that are different are the words "and financial or other constraints". The Secretary of State knows that those words are wide enough for him to give directions in practice as to the financial and other constraints that are to be imposed on the review body.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the Secretary of State in a minute, because this is an important point. Clause 1(1) allows the Prime Minister to establish the review body and the Secretary of State to refer to it

"such matters relating to the statutory conditions of the employment of school teachers"

as he may from time to time decide. Therefore, he determines the terms of reference. I cannot for the life of me understand why that directional power is necessary unless it is to be used to constrain the review body, in the same way as the interim advisory committee has been constrained, on matters of affordability.

Mr. Clarke: In his analysis of what is really a Committee point, the hon. Gentleman pointed out that the 1987 Act contains a reference to the financial constraints to which the independent advisory committee was to be subject when making its recommendations. This is merely a general power to give directions to review bodies as to considerations to which they are to have regard. I have already said that they are to be asked to have regard to affordability—as evidenced, among other things, by the standard spending assessments for education—and also to the need to recruit and retain people of adequate motivation. That is not the same as having a financial limit given to them. The 1987 Act made the interim advisory committee subject to a financial remit.

Mr. Straw: With great respect, this cannot be dismissed as a Committee point. Central to the operation of the Bill is whether the review body will be able to exercise independence of judgment. It will not be exactly the same as other review bodies. Their terms of reference are established. The Government give evidence about issues such as affordability and the standard spending assessment and then reserve their position. In this case, there will be a statutory power to give directions. The Bill does not say that the review body "can" have regard to the directions; it "must" have regard to them.

The Secretary of State knows full well that, when words such as that are used in a measure, the review body will have to pay regard to those considerations; it will not be given the opportunity to weigh the evidence. Instead, it is being told that its starting point on any issue regarding which the Government have given directions must be that. When the teachers's unions understand the point in more detail, they will say that this is unacceptable and is likely to undermine faith in the review body's independence.

If the Secretary of State wants this arrangement to be successful, between now and the Committee stage he ought to look carefully into whether it is necessary. My guess is that it was inserted by the Treasury as a belt and braces provision. It is not needed if this body is to operate as an ordinary review body. The fact from which we do not resile is that, on the basis of clear and compelling grounds, the Government can change or phase in a review body recommendation and can give evidence. That ought to provide sufficient protection. The similarity of the wording in this Bill and the 1987 Act regarding the direction-making power must lead to the review body's practice being closely related to that of the interim advisory committee.

Mr. Clarke: To repeat what I said before, the Government will not be giving the review body a financial remit of the type that the interim advisory committee had. We shall reject recommendations only for clear and compelling reasons. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the review body should be established on that basis? The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) asked the hon. Gentleman the same question, and, interestingly, he asked him whether he would be in favour of that, if one of the unions disagreed. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) seems to be wandering off to every other point that he can think of without answering perfectly clear questions. Does he agree with my statement of policy? Would he be put off, as the hon. Member for Truro asked him, if one union disagreed?

Mr. Straw: I have already answered emphatically the question about one union. As for the Secretary of State's question, an explanation has still to be offered to me as to why direction-making powers should be included in the Bill. If they are unnecessary, they should not be there. They would be a temptation to Ministers, a temptation that they would use.

Mr. Walden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I do not intend to give way to him. I have been speaking for 33 minutes and have already allowed a great many interventions. I want to get to the end of my speech.

The Secretary of State referred to industrial action. He said that the Labour party has already supported every strike by public sector workers. He must know that that is a calumny. If we are to have a serious debate about how to raise the professionalism and self-esteem of teachers, he must know that that is untrue. There have been many occasions—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name one."]—I shall name one: the NUT conference at Easter took the decision to threaten strike action.—[HON. MEMBERS: "You supported that."] That is literally untrue.

I defer to nobody in my view that, so far as humanly possible, industrial action should be avoided inside schools. Even *The Sun* managed to see the distinction. That is a completely different point from the suggestion that the right to strike should be removed. On 17 April, the Secretary of State tried to bluster his way through. He suggested that this policy would go ahead only if the unions agreed to remove the right to strike. That turned out to be a fig leaf, but a transparent one. The Bill says nothing at all about that. There have just been a few words from the Secretary of State. He has insinuated that, somehow, all this depends upon the removal of the right to strike. It does not.

All hon. Members want education to be free from industrial action, but the Government must recognise that they bear a heavy responsibility for any disruption that has taken place in the past. Moreover, they bear a heavy responsibility in the future.

Mrs. Currie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I want to come to the end of my remarks.

Mrs. Currie: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely we need to know, in view of what the hon. Gentleman says, whether he intends to vote for or against the Bill, or to abstain.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The way that hon. Members vote in the House has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair.

Mr. Straw: Our reasoned amendment speaks of the Secretary of State breaking faith with the teaching profession and also breaking faith with the House. Our view is that the way that he conducted himself in relation to the first School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill was a breach of faith and that the Secretary of State's conduct was unacceptable.

When he spoke on 17 April, the Secretary of State said that, if we looked back to the Second Reading debate, we should realise that the Government were careful to keep their options open. We find nothing of the kind. If we look back to the debate on 27 November 1990 we find that the Secretary of State said:

> "The Bill contains the agreed policy of this Government. I can certainly speak for two of the candidates for the position of Prime Minister who are committed to the Bill".

At the end of his speech he said:

> "I therefore commend the Bill to the House."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1990; Vo. 181, c. 743-56.]

There were no "ifs" or "buts" in his Second Reading speech, and there were no "ifs" or "buts" in Committee.

The Secretary of State pretends that there has been a change of climate since November. That is a bogus explanation. What has happened since November is that there has been a change of Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister says that he wants to do something about education, but he has also said that he is not quite sure what, according to *The Times*. Since November, he has

[Mr. Straw]

been scrubbing about trying to find out what it is that he should do. He has come up with this inadequate proposal. The Secretary of State has a duty to be honest with the House.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman who speaks on education matters for the Opposition——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite clear that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is not giving way. This is totally irresponsible and undisciplined behaviour.

Mr. Straw: When I wrote to the Secretary of State asking him what had happened to the Bill, he said to me:

"As you know, there is considerable pressure of business in the House. We are of course looking at the timetable for this Bill alongside competing priorities for Parliamentary time."

That explanation was simply untrue. The Secretary of State owes an apology to the House for offering hon. Members statements that are completely inconsistent with the facts.

As the draft Conservative education manifesto says, there is a crisis of confidence among teachers. The bill, in the hands of the Government, is the cause of that crisis and not its solution. I commend our amendment to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding further, I have an announcement for the House. In his wisdom, Mr. Speaker has now lifted the 10-minute limit on speeches, leaving it to the common sense and self-discipline of Members to see that all those wishing to be called are able to speak before the House divides at 10 o'clock.

5.40 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall be brief and shall keep within the 10-minute limit that was previously in force.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, I introduced the review body for nurses, and there are one or two lessons to be learned from that. I listened with mounting disbelief to the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). As I understand it, his policy on the review body is that, if the NUT agrees, he will agree, and if the NUT does not agree, he will not agree. It is demeaning for a major political party simply to wait to be told what position to take. The hon. Gentleman's speech was disappointing and thin, and was attended pretty thinly by an Opposition on a three-line Whip. In my view, the hon. Gentleman is leading his own party down the wrong road and it would be a tragedy if he succeeded in doing the same with the teaching profession.

There is no question but that, over the past 20 or 30 years, Governments of all parties have faced substantial difficulties in finding the right mechanism for determining the pay of large public service professions. Any Government would need to balance a number of demands. There is a need to be fair to the particular profession when the Government are ultimately the employer or provide the finance for the salaries; there is also a need to be fair to the taxpayer and the public, because large settlements are expensive for the public and can pre-empt money to other public services.

Education is no more an island than the health service, and one has to take all those considerations into account. It is crucial to be fair to the public who are intended to benefit from any public service—in this case, education, but it also applies to the health service. It is clear that the public do not benefit from a public service suffering from industrial action and strikes. Nothing can be worse for health or education than strike action, which scars those services.

Getting the balance right is a problem for the Government. It was a problem for the last Labour Government and for previous Conservative and Labour Governments. Only a party bigot would argue otherwise. The issue is not simple, but the problem occurs in a large profession when the Government are the employer or finance it. It is much simpler in practical terms in an individual school or hospital and can be settled on that level, but all experience shows that problems arise in large professional groups.

No system of pay determination is perfect, but in education, the pay review body is the best hope and has worked out most fairly for all. All experience shows that the last thing that leaders of professions covered by pay review bodies want to do is give up those pay review bodies. The last thing that the general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, the director-general of the British Medical Association or whoever represents the top civil servants would want to do is give up their pay review bodies. They value them and consider them most important. That is why I find the Opposition's position on pay review bodies so extraordinary and incomprehensible. They have a three-line Whip against the award of a pay review body, which is probably the best thing that has happened to the teaching profession for many years.

The usual criticism of pay review bodies does not normally come from the left. The classic opposition comes from the right, and is along the lines that review bodies get in the way of the market and we should not interfere with the running of the market. I was presented with that criticism when I introduced the pay review body for nurses. It is not what I imagine Labour clubs throughout the country to discuss every Friday and Saturday. Opposition to pay review bodies can also come from Treasury Ministers—under Labour or Conservative Governments—who will probably say for the next 30 years, as they have said for the past 30 years, that a review body limits the Government's freedom. To be frank, anyone who has had to deal with a review body knows that it limits the Government's freedom. That is the price that the Government have to pay.

I know that things have changed since I left the Government just over 12 months ago. I have no knowledge of the negotiations that took place to provide a review body on teachers' pay, but the idea that, in all the discussions and debates on the matter, Treasury Ministers were saying that the country and the profession needed a review body is quite comical. I cannot imagine that Treasury Ministers were going up and down Whitehall with placards in favour of a review body for the teaching profession. Unless Chief Secretaries have changed in the past 12 months, that is an entirely fanciful idea.

Anyone who has sat round the Cabinet table considering the outcome of review body reports knows perfectly well that they limit the freedom of the Government. It is certainly possible to stage reports, and in the past we have done precisely that, but one would

think three or four times before rejecting such a report. The power to do so exists, but it is rarely used—for the good reason that, having set up a review body, the last thing the Government would want is for that review body to resign, pack up and disappear.

If the only thing that worries and concerns the Opposition is the independence of the pay review body, I stress that all experience is that once a pay review body is established, its independence is taken for granted. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and I were negotiating with the Treasury on public spending, he regularly used the expression, "If the Chief Secretary offered me that deal, I would bite his hand off." That sums up my view on what the teachers should do presented with the proposition that my right hon. and learned Friend is offering them this afternoon. If the teachers want to make comparisons, they should look at the nursing profession and compare the experience of the nursing profession before and after the review body was set up.

The hon. Member for Blackburn made an extraordinarily weak speech, but he knows more than most about what happened to the nursing profession before and after the review body was set up. The hon. Gentleman was the special adviser to Lady Castle who hammered the nurses into the ground in the mid-1970s. If the hon. Gentleman wants the figures, I can provide them.

In 1974-75, nurses and midwives were given a 20 per cent. increase. That sounds all very well, but the retail prices index was 26·3 per cent. and the index of average earnings was 27·6 per cent. Next year, the figure was 8 per cent., the RPI was 12 per cent. and the index of average earnings was almost 14 per cent. In 1976-77, the award was 5 per cent., the RPI was 17·6 per cent. and the index of average earnings was 8·5 per cent. Under the review body, in 1983-84 the increase for nurses was 7·5 per cent., the RPI was 4 per cent. and the index of average earnings was 5 per cent. In 1984-85, the increase was 8·6 per cent., the RPI was 6·9 per cent. and the figure for average earnings was 5·3 per cent. In 1988-89, the increase was 17·9 per cent., the RPI was 4·8 per cent. and average earnings were 8·5 per cent.

Nurses have done spectacularly well under their review body. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State rightly said, for that reason professional leaders who have experience of the system value it very much. If one said to the BMA, "We are going to take away the review body," the health service would grind to a halt.

My advice to teachers is that, by rejecting a pay review body, they would be missing an historic opportunity. It is the one step that could do the most to meet their professional aspirations. If they do not want a review body, they can simply reject it by taking strike action. The Government are limiting their freedom in pay determination; the quid pro quo is that there should be no strike action. Every review body operates under that condition, and I very much hope that that will always be so.

The vast majority of the teaching profession want not to take industrial action but to have a sensible and fair method of determining their pay, which is the purpose of the pay review body. It is the best deal for teachers.

Children are crucial to this debate. They cannot benefit from a system that can lead to industrial action, which is so against their best interests.

Only one group can oppose the proposal on logical grounds—union activists whose raison d'etre is being able to threaten industrial action to get their way. There is no doubt that there is a role for trade unions in the review body system. They must give evidence to the review body, which will be questioned. Their skill and the quality of their evidence will determine much.

There is no role for the threatener—the NUT delegate we see on our television screen each Easter. Most of the public and the profession will not shed tears if such a character disappears into the background, where he belongs.

By opposing the Bill with a three-line Whip, the Labour party has made one of the worst mistakes of this Paliament. It has shown that its true interests are not the public, children or teachers, and that it remains the prisoner of the big public service unions. In a sense, that is why the Government were elected in 1979. The most revealing aspect of the debate—the hon. Member for Blackburn did not mention this—is that the Labour party remains in a—I was going to say "equivocal" but it is worse that that—subservient position to the big public service unions.

Education, the classroom and the pay of professional teachers should not be an industrial battlefield. The Bill gives us the best hope of moving from that prospect to a much fairer and better way of determining teachers' pay. For that reason, I support the Bill, but above all I hope that the teaching profession will respond to it. I believe that the Government are right and that the Labour party has been disastrously wrong in its tactics this afternoon.

5.54 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) lectured us about making the worst mistake in this Parliament, but he knows much about bad mistakes in this Parliament. He was one of the people behind the poll tax. Was that not a mistake? Is it not a continuing mistake? Son of poll tax is in the background. We shall see whether that is a mistake. We do not need lectures from the right hon. Gentleman about bad mistakes in this Parliament. We have seen such mistakes in the past 12 years, never mind in one Parliament, so let us not have that nonsense. If the right hon. Gentleman prefers that nonsense, he is welcome to it.

A glaring omission from the debate has been the fact that, in the past few years, teachers have had neither a review body nor any pre-negotiation. Their negotiating rights were taken away. I oppose the Bill, and I hope that Labour Members will oppose it. I have faith that they will, but when negotiations—*[Interruption.]* The Minister constantly mutters, but I never know what he is saying. Would he like me to give way?

Mr. Eggar: It is clear to the hon. Gentleman, as it was to Conservative Members, that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has not made his position clear. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will ask the hon. Member for Blackburn whether the Labour party favours the review body.

Mr. Flannery: I do not need to do so; my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) stated bluntly that he opposes the Bill, and it needs opposing. It is one of the most serious things that the teaching profession has faced since the last war.

[Mr. Flannery]

Conservative Members send their children to private schools. Education is in the hands of people who hate the state sector. It is no good them smiling, because that is the reality. The Bill strikes a blow at the reason——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) *rose*——

Mr. Flannery: We want to allow every hon. Member who is present to speak, and I want to contribute my little bit. I shall not go on too long—I promise.

The Bill strikes a blow at the fundamental principles of trade unionism. Trade unions were created for two fundamental reasons—for the free negotiation of pay, and for the free negotiation of conditions of service. They came into being after Tolpuddle, and they exist today for the same reason.

Unions that support the pay review body have expressed profound reservations. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn quoted from a document issued by the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association. It says:

"Second Reading: Monday 29th April 1991",

which I believe is today. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to show Conservative Members that this is an up-to-date document. It continues:

"The Association regrets the haste with which the Government has brought forward this pivotal debate."

That statement was made by AMMA, not by me or the National Union of Teachers. The association continued:

"It is less than two weeks since the first announcement by the Secretary of State for Education and Science"—

the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not in his seat—

"that it has become the Government's intention to give teachers a Review Body. There has been no opportunity for consultation to have yet taken place and we are therefore necessarily limited in our understanding of the Government's full proposals. We very much hope that Ministers will explain their plans more clearly in the course of the Second Reading debate."

Why have the Government suddenly changed their mind? I have been a member of almost every Standing Committee on education matters since I became a Member, but I was ill during the discussion of the first School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill. For six or seven weeks, the Government were determined to give negotiating rights back to teachers. That decision was not made out of thin air. They were repeatedly told by the International Labour Organisation, a United Nations body, that they were breaking international law by taking away teachers' negotiating rights. If hon. Members want to see the record of that statement, they can get hold of it. Most Labour Members have seen it.

AMMA stated:

"Members will recall that, in November 1990, the Association urged rejection of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill at Second Reading. Our view was then based on two grounds, that

'(1) new procedures and powers in the Bill for the local determination of teachers' pay and conditions of employment are, at the least, ill-judged and premature; and

(2) the reserve powers accruing to the Secretary of State are so excessive as to jeopardise the success of negotiating machinery established under the Bill.'"

The association welcomed the fact that teachers' negotiating machinery would be restored and is surprised as anyone that the Government have decided not to do so. Referring to the latest Bill, the association stated:

"The Bill as drafted would empower the Secretary of State to 'give directions to the review body as to considerations to which they are to have regard.'"

The association—not the NUT or the Labour Front Bench—referred to other review bodies. It did not mean the review body that is offered to the teaching profession now. The association stated:

"Other review bodies, which have achieved success over a long period, operate instead within concise standing terms of reference 'to advise the Prime Minister on the remuneration' of a named group of employees."

The other review bodies did not exist to act as negotiators and to tell teachers that they must accept what is offered whether they like it or not.

It is true that offers to other professions have been reasonable, but there is not much faith in the idea that an offer from the Government to teachers will be reasonable. Teachers, like NUT leaders and the Labour party, do not want anything to upset teaching in the classroom. They made it clear that they were putting the matter to a poll. I am confident—I know a thing or two about it—that teachers would refuse to take strike action. The NUT leadership, including me, have been struggling for a different system.

AMMA stated:

"The additional considerations to which the Government wishes a review body to have regard, year by year, are submitted only in the form of evidence from the relevant Department. We see no justification for the proposed departure from this precedent of evidence, which is essentially reasoned in its nature, being the medium of communication to a genuinely independent body."

The association does not want any action to be taken, although it would have liked negotiating rights to be established. It proposes substituting a review body for negotiating rights. I believe that the association is making a mistake, but only time will tell. The NUT, of which I am a member, wants teachers' negotiating rights to be restored and is opposed to the review body.

The International Labour Organisation made it clear that the Government should restore negotiating rights. Even the Government repeatedly stated that the withdrawal of those rights was only temporary and that they would be given back. The Government are violating international law by taking away those rights. Teachers have no negotiating rights and no review body.

Article 4 of ILO convention 98 contains crucial words, which I underline in my mind:

"machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers' organisations and workers' organisations with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by means of collective agreements."

That is what the ILO wants, whether the Government like it or not.

Teachers are eagerly making concessions to the Government in the belief that the Government will make some concessions to them. The teachers are mistaken. They are taking the Government on trust. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn referred to clause 2. The explanatory and financial memorandum states that clause 2

"enables the Secretary of State, in certain circumstances, to make an order without having received a report from the review body; provides that the remuneration of school teachers is to be determined and paid by local education authorities and the governors of grant-maintained schools in accordance with the provisions of such orders".

The Secretary of State can make a wide-ranging order without having heard a word from the review body. Is that

the way in which the review body will be used at the beginning? I hope not. There are more disquieting measures in the Bill.

None of us wants anything to upset classrooms. Many Labour Members were teachers, as were some Conservative Members. I believe that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) was a science teacher and that he did not want his classrooms disrupted. The Government have made a mess of the entire education system. Some years ago, a gentleman in the Tory party spoke about democracy. He said that it was untidy, ponderous and slow but was the best thing we had. Those were the words of Winston Churchill at about the beginning of the war.

Conservatives Members are characterised by gross impatience. Instead of negotiating with teachers on pay and conditions, they took away negotiating rights and precipitated all the trouble that we are experiencing. If they had not done that, there would have been no need for two Bills to restore negotiating rights. Our children would have been taught, possibly without regular testing for seven-year-olds. I said that I was backing the Bill in one sense only. The purpose of the first Bill was to return negotiating rights to teachers. Labour Members struggled to achieve certain conditions within those negotiating rights. I do not believe that any real conditions were offered, but at least negotiating rights were expected to follow then.

The argument that the review body is a negotiating organisation is nonsense. It can impose what it wishes, and teachers believe, from their experience, that that is what it will do. Those unions and parties that believe that the review body is a negotiating organisation and that have abandoned the fundamental right to free negotiation are relinquishing a right for which our ancestors fought hard over a couple of hundred years. I would not want it to be given up easily. All other European nations have freedom of negotiation.

Mr. Hawkins: What does the hon. Gentleman mean by "returning to negotiating rights?" I do not believe that he means returning to Burnham. If my memory serves me rightly, the Burnham negotiating machinery agreed on a settlement only about three times in a couple of decades. It was a major forum for disagreement. I should have thought that a review body was a better way of solving problems.

Mr. Flannery: I should not dream of lecturing the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) on what I mean by negotiating rights. He knows that I mean free negotiations between employers and teachers. I said nothing about going back to Burnham—only he has that leaning, which is nonsense. I do not want to go back to Burnham; it is dead and gone and we have since come a long way. The hon. Gentleman accuses us of wanting to go back to Burnham as he accuses us of wanting strike action. Both ideas are nonsense, and he knows that.

Mr. Hawkins: Then what?

Mr. Flannery: We shall have a review body, whether we want one or not. The Government took away negotiating rights without giving us any say in the matter. They promised to restore them, but did not do so.

The Government will impose a review body, and I only hope that it is honourable, not like the words that I read from the Bill. The Education Reform Act 1988—which should have been called the Education Deform Act—gave about 400 new powers to the Secretary of State. We were appalled, and we can see the chaos that resulted in schools.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): If the hon. Member does not want a pay review body or a return to Burnham, what does he want?

Mr. Flannery: I made it clear to the hon. Member for High Peak. I told him that I wanted negotating rights. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) cannot have been listening. I read out what the International Labour Organisation said. Shall I read it again? Hon. Members should stop telling me to do what I have already done. Conservative Members are hard pressed.

On Second Readi—

Mrs. Hicks *rose*—

Sir Norman Fowler *rose*—

Mr. Flannery: There is a queue. The hon. Lady was a member of the Select Committee, so I shall give way to her.

Mrs. Hicks: I heard what the hon. Gentleman said perfectly clearly, but, perhaps like my colleagues, I do not understand his interpretation of negotiating rights. What will it mean in practice in terms of achieving a solution to the problem of teachers who naturally want an annual increase in salary?

Mr. Flannery: Does the hon. Lady really want me to tell her? There is a table: employers sit on one side and union representatives sit on the other. They talk to each other and put forward arguments. Sometimes it changes—[HON. MEMBERS: "Burnham."] Whenever anybody negotiates, Conservative Members say that it is like Burnham. That is their opinion. They are old-fashioned. They do not seem to be in the present age. I know that the Government are in a mess—a 12-year-old dilemma. They do not know where they are, but I thought that they would understand some simple matters, such as negotiating rights.

Mr. Steinberg *rose*—

Mr. Flannery: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, as he was also a member of the Select Committee.

Mr. Steinberg: I am enjoying my hon. Friend's contribution. We desperately missed him from the Committee on the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill.

Mr. Flannery: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Steinberg: I will accept a drink tonight.

In answer to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks), may I say that Ministers—one of whom is sitting on the Front Bench—argued vehemently in Committee for negotiating rights between trade union representatives and employers. That is exactly what we want. The Minister who is sitting with his hands in his pockets—I think they are in his pockets—argued vehemently for those rights no more than two or three months ago.

Mr. Flannery: That was not so much an inquiry as an attempt to help me along. I agree with all that my hon. Friend has said.

[Mr. Flannery]

We are dealing with a serious issue. I want not a review body but a right to free negotiation such as that held by every teacher body in all democratic nations. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for High Peak keeps interrupting me from a sedentary position. If he is not clear about what negotiating rights mean, we should have a talk. God help anyone who negotiates with the Tory party for an increase in pay and conditions, because he will not get it.

The Government are offering a bribe. It would stick in their craw to give us the right to honourable negotiation, so they are thinking of something else, and that something else is a review body. They have promised all sorts of things, but I want to ask a serious question. They make promises about what they will do for teachers, but can we believe that the party that imposed the poll tax will keep its promises to help teachers?

The Conservative party has played havoc with almost every section of working people by splitting them—such as the ambulance men and nurses—and by attacking them —as it is still doing—and by imposing the poll tax, and now the son of poll tax, and by attacking our health service. Let me make it clear once again that the Conservatives voted against the health service. I do not want to pursue that idea, but the Conservatives said that we should not have a health service. *[Interruption.]* Yes, they voted against it, but that is a big theme.

The teaching unions and anyone who follows the same lines as those taken by the five unions will discover that they are barking up the wrong tree and that this ruthless Government, who are in the last phases of office, are, in desperation, getting up to all types of tricks. They are offering bribes—the review body is a bribe to teachers. I am sad that five unions have accepted it, although my own union—the National Union of Teachers—has not. I hope that the Labour party will not accept it.

6.16 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I have been looking forward to making this speech for a long time. As one who has consistently supported the concept of a pay review body for teachers, I am delighted to support the Bill. It marks a watershed for the teaching profession and for the future of education, because, if we are to learn anything from history, we must learn from its mistakes.

We have heard much about negotiating rights. I first became involved in national education in 1974 and, as many hon. Members know, the Houghton award to teachers was made in the same year. It was a recognition that, in spite of negotiating rights, which existed in a form that we know—or knew—as Burnham, teachers' pay had been allowed to fall behind. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, it had fallen under successive Governments. The Houghton award was a massive hike, but it was significant that it referred to what came to be known in the jargon of negotiations between teacher employers and teaching unions as the "Houghton teacher".

The Houghton teacher was a teacher whom the report regarded as someone who would receive a professional salary while exercising a professional commitment which, I am bound to say, has been shown by the vast majority of teachers, regardless of some of the nonsense—such as strike action—that we have seen during the past decade.

My involvement went further than merely becoming a member of a national education body. I had the dubious privilege—privilege because to deal with anything to do with education is a privilege and dubious because any contact with Burnham must be regarded in that way—of becoming a member of the Burnham committee. I was the deputy leader of the employers' side of the management panel.

To talk about meaningful negotiations during the period of the Burnham committee is nonsense and a contradiction in terms. While one union was negotiating across the table, the leader of another union was outside, giving his press conference and explaining how much better he could do. It was a shambles, which had a further complication. I know that because I trod the path from Church house to the office of the Secretary of State in Elizabeth house to see whether the employers could get an extra 0·5 per cent. to try to conclude the negotiations. Burnham had few friends then, and it has even fewer friends today.

During that period, an opportunity was offered to the unions in 1974. It was lost not because it was thrown away by the vast majority of teachers, who responded well, but because of the internecine disputes between trade unions that would not accept the opportunity.

We must recognise that the Bill is an acceptance that we have come a long way. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I did not favour the original School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill, because I felt that it was a move backwards to a sort of son of Burnham. I could see nothing in that Bill which would move us significantly forward. I have been a long-time supporter of a pay review body. Things have been changing for a long time. We have seen a far more progressive and foward-looking attitude from many of the teacher unions which is far more in touch, and far more in keeping, with the aspirations of their members.

The changes have brought us to where we are today. Five of the teacher unions support the Bill. They may have qualifications and reservations, but one of the great strengths of the Bill is that it is buttressed by an absence of a statutory requirement not to strike. That is an acceptance of the changes that have taken place. I have been greatly encouraged during the past month by many of the statements from the second largest teacher union which have been supportive of the concept. The unions were looking forwards, not backwards, and recognising that the problems that bedevilled Burnham and its negotiations had to be abandoned for ever, and that a new mechanism and a new opportunity had to be seized. The Bill is that new opportunity.

To turn our backs on the Bill now would deny teachers what all members of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts acknowledged. We may have had different reasons and we could support some of the proposals wholeheartedly, and some less so. We recognised the problem that teachers faced and we recognised the considerable problem of lack of morale which teachers expressed to us. Over and over again, their view came across to us. It was not just a matter of pay, although that was fundamentally important; it was a matter of status and of esteem.

Teachers were conscious that they had slipped in public esteem. They were conscious that whether parents were sympathetic to some of their broad aims begged the question. They were conscious that parents were fed up to the back teeth with their children's education being disrupted. The unions have recognised that. They realise that to go again down the road of disruption would be the final nail in the coffin of esteem for teachers and of teachers' morale. The Bill is the way forward and the opportunity.

From figures that have been put before the House today, we have learnt that groups of people who are covered by a pay review body will, in general terms, do far better than those who are not. That clearly signals the Government's intention to raise the morale of teachers, to give them the professional standing they deserve and to say to parents that the Government's commitment to a strong, well-paid and esteemed teaching profession lies at the centre of their education policies.

Governments can legislate until they are blue in the face on the national curriculum, but the success of the reforms depends solely on the teacher delivering them in the classroom. If we can get the teachers behind us—I believe that the Bill will do so in a way that has not been possible before—we shall do an enormous service to education.

I find it incomprehensible that Opposition Front Bench Members have taken their view today. I have had many conversations about education with the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I am broadly in agreement with many points that he has made, as I am with many of the points made by Opposition members of the Select Committee. I had respect for many of their views. I listened today with a sense of disbelief, because all that we have heard shows that the Labour party is firmly wedded to the past rather than looking forward very much to the future.

I have said that I believe that the Bill is a watershed —I do not believe that I can overstate that point. However, if not only the Labour party, but any of the teacher unions—one is standing out at the moment—reject this opportunity, they are doing a grave disservice to teachers and to education, and an even greater disservice to children.

The delivery of education to our children must be central to any education policy. That is at the heart of our debate. I urge Opposition Members and the members of the National Union of Teachers who stand against the Bill to recognise it as an opportunity. The failure to do so will mean that they stand condemned as wedded to the past and entrenched in a culture that signally failed to deliver what teachers wanted and what education needed, and which deprived many of our children in the past year. I will now finish my speech; I am astonished by my moderation.

6.27 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): To ensure that there is no doubt, and to save interventions in the early part of my speech—I have no intention of speaking for as long as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) did—I must tell the House that I and my party unequivocally support the move towards a review body, although we have reservations about the way in which the move was made and about the details of the proposal. We take that view for many of the reasons given by Conservative Members who support the implementation of a review body.

Above all, we take that view because the last thing that is needed now—just as it was the last thing that was needed five months ago when we discussed similar provisions here —is further delay and confusion. The main problem for teachers today is not the level of pay, although there are problems, but morale in the profession and the way in which teachers feel that they have been treated.

One big step towards correcting that problem is to sort out the way in which teachers' pay and conditions are determined. The status that should come with a review body, provided that it is made to work, which will require support not only from teachers, but from the Government, will be, as the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) said, a turning point for teachers. I certainly hope it is.

The Government would have commanded more support for their position had they shown a little more humility in their presentation. There is no question but that the Government's position has changed dramatically since they presented the original Bill five months ago. It is difficult for them to justify dressing the present Bill up as merely a reaction to changed circumstances. The truth is that many of those in the ministerial team favoured a review body in the first place but were prevented from advocating such a move. With a change of Minister and a change of Prime Minister, they found it rather easier to persuade their colleagues of the merits of their case. A little humility would not have gone amiss. Ministers should have said that the Government did not have it right in the first place but have now taken a large step forward.

At least the Government's position has the benefit of some clarity, which is more than can be said for that of the Labour party. I think that the Labour party is split. I say that because, although it is clear what some Labour Back Benchers think, we cannot be altogether certain what the Front-Bench spokesmen think. I think that the Front-Bench spokesmen are broadly in favour of the principle of a review body, but not on the terms that the Government now propose. That is our position, too, although we state it more clearly than Labour Members have so far managed to do.

In the debate on the original Bill—five months ago almost to the day—the Secretary of State told us that all the candidates for the leadership of the Conservative party were united in their support for the Bill and that there was no doubt about the party's position on it. Presumably the right hon. and learned Gentleman wanted to alleviate any doubt about whether the Bill would make normal progress regardless of the musical chairs at the top. I queried whether that was the case, and suggested that, in view of the arguments that candidates in the leadership contest were advancing, it might be wise to pause for reflection —to have a breathing space—before reaching a decision. I suggested that, in view of what the candidates were saying, a review body might be more appropriate than the arrangements that Ministers were then pressing upon us.

That was not to be. The Secretary of State said:

"it is time now to put more permanent arrangements into place."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1990; Vol. 181, c. 743.]

At the second sitting of the Standing Committee, the Minister of State said:

"We want to proceed as rapidly as possible. That is why we want to make good progress in the Committee."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 11 December 1990; c. 40.]

I expressed my doubts and warned him that he might live to regret it. We then suffered many weeks of discussions on the Bill.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman enjoyed it.

Mr. Taylor: I enjoyed it, but I am not sure that all of us enjoyed all of the Committee's proceedings. Now that the Government have withdrawn the Bill, I suspect that many of us feel that we might have found better things to do than engaging in wasted work. Moreover, I wonder what our proceedings on the Bill cost.

Despite my criticism of the Labour party's response to the proposal and of Opposition Members' cloudy approach today, and despite my support for the broad principle of a review body, I must express considerable support for the reasoned amendment, principally because of the appalling way in which Ministers have treated the House. There can be no excuse whatever for Ministers, who knew that they were engaged in a process that could lead to the tearing up of the original Bill and the presentation of another Bill, not to have informed politicians and the general public of what was going on so that they could contribute to the process and so that time and money were not wasted.

We should compare the secrecy that prevailed until the final announcement was made with the professions of consultations that preceded the original Bill. We were told that the reason why, for five years, teachers had gone without satisfactory pay machinery, was that consultation needed to be undertaken and plans laid, and that everyone needed to be involved in making the decision. The Government finally came up with the original Bill and, even as we were debating it, they were writing without any consultation a completely different Bill—the Bill that we are debating today.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the principle of the Bill, there is no doubt whatever in my mind that the way in which the matter was handled was entirely wrong. Worst of all, once the Bill left Committee, we had a long delay, with no explanation, and Ministers were engaged in clear deceit, claiming that the only reason for the delay was the lack of parliamentary time. At one stage, when I asked the Secretary of State what was going on, he ducked into the toilet in the Lobby. Having discussed the matter with the hon. Member for Blackburn, I understand that he had exactly the same experience.

Perhaps the Secretary of State has a weak bladder, in which case I am sure we all sympathise, but it seems extraordinary that, in each case, his complaint should have been brought on by inquiries about what was happening to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill. We were deliberately misled. There are not many ways in which we can express our concern in this place and, in my view, that is good enough reason to support the reasoned amendment—to express our dissatisfaction with the way in which the decisions have been taken.

Let me raise a few specific points about the Bill. Are Ministers considering extending benefits to teachers in other sectors of education—for example, university teachers—who suffer from low pay and poor morale? In particular, what thought has been given to teachers in sixth form colleges and colleges of tertiary education, who have been opted out of the marvellous review system that the Government are establishing, with no real explanation of what is to take its place in their case? They are in an invidious position.

That is especially true of some teachers in my constituency, who work in a sixth form attached to a school in respect of which a move to tertiary status was approved the day before the Secretary of State made the announcement. They are hardly likely to be pleased with the circumstances into which they have been cast. I suspect that Ministers have not thought the matter through. In any case, those teachers' position is wholly invidious.

I hope that it will be possible to make quick progress and that the matter can be resolved without the need to extend the operation of the interim advisory committee for another year. I know that Ministers want to make progress, but that may not be easy given the present time scale. I should appreciate it if Ministers would spell out the timetable that they envisage and, in particular, when they expect the review body to start its work. Will it be early this autumn or not until next year? At what stage can we expect the review body and Ministers to lay down a timetable within which they expect to work? A measure of consultation earlier in the process would undoubtedly have helped the Government to get the legislation through and, given the way in which they have proceeded, Ministers have only themselves to blame if they experience difficulties.

My concern for speed arises not simply from a desire to try to help the Government to fulfil promises that they have already missed by a couple of years. It seems to me that if the present Bill is a turning point it is because of the benefits that will flow from the establishment of a review body, and no one will want those benefits to be unnecessarily delayed. The sooner teachers get the professional status, financial backing and moral support they deserve, the better it will be for children in schools.

Mr. Steinberg: Will the hon. Gentleman explain what he sees as the difference between a pay review body and the interim advisory committee?

Mr. Taylor: It is not my intention to go into a rather long peroration. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be on the Standing Committee. At that stage, the matter that he raises can be debated in detail.

Mr. Steinberg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: There are several points that I want to raise, and I do not want to delay the debate unnecessarily. Let us hope that we shall get some answers.

Teachers need to be convinced that the Government recognise the problems they face in their day-to-day work —rundown buildings, insufficient equipment, large classes, mounting bureaucracy, the rapid introduction of the national curriculum and assessment. The list is endless. It is a debate that we have rehearsed. I hope that the introduction of a review body will go some way towards solving the problems, but by no stretch of the imagination should we see it as a final solution.

In view of the status and the pay machinery that the Government want to introduce for teachers, they ought to consider again the creation of a general teaching council. This would be an appropriate time to introduce just that. Such a body would link very well into the review system. There is no doubt that a general teaching council would have things to say. I hope that, in the current climate, Ministers will feel more able to consider taking such a course.

We need clarification, too, of what is meant by the Secretary of State's assertion that the proposals are made on the basis that teachers will not take industrial action. Clearly, there is room for one trade union, or for

individuals in the profession, to take ad hoc action that is not supported by the vast majority. While a state of chaos is hardly likely to encourage the good operation of the review body, I hope that the Minister will confirm that the Government are no more inclined than is the Labour party to be swayed off course by the individual actions of a handful of teachers, or even of one trade union, particularly in the early days, when there may be inter-union and other political reasons for trying to rock the boat with a view to preventing this proposal from working.

Should such a situation arise, I would regret it most deeply, but I see the potential. It is important that Ministers should say that they would not allow it to distract them from the process on which they are now embarked.

There remains the further important issue of how much direction will be given to what must be a fully independent body and must be seen as such. The Bill as it stands gives the Secretary of State strong powers of direction that other review bodies do not have. This point has been referred to by several hon. Members. I listened carefully to the comments of the Secretary of State, and was glad to hear him make it clear that he does not intend to use those powers. In the nature of events, of course, he may not be in office very long, and whoever succeeds him may have different views.

It is not apparent to me why stronger powers than the Secretary of State says he wants should have been written into the Bill. I therefore hope that, in Committee, Ministers will look carefully at the amendments that will no doubt be tabled. I myself shall seek to introduce amendments to bring the provisions into line with the powers that the Secretary of State says he wants, as distinct from those that, currently, he seems intent on giving himself.

The rush with which this Bill has been introduced disguises another major change that the Government have undertaken to make. I refer to the removal of the power of the local education authorities to opt out of the national settlement. That is a very important and constructive move, which will facilitate the work of the review body. In this regard, Ministers ought to have the humility to confess that they have accepted the arguments, put forward by myself and by Labour Members, stressing that opting out would not be an appropriate course, particularly at the time of the introduction of a whole new structure. Indeed, the two things are contradictory. This time, Ministers avoided the contradiction, and that is to be welcomed.

But there is still the question of the opting out of grant-maintained schools. In this regard, the point that I put to the Secretary of State was not fully answered. The point to which I refer is that, given that the Secretary of State believes that there are real reasons why grant-maintained schools should not wish to opt out of the review body settlements, and that there are serious and genuine concerns about what would happen were they to do so—within a school and, indeed, bearing in mind the knock-on effect outside—it is extraordinary that this Bill requires the Secretary of State automatically to accept a proposal by the governing body of a grant-maintained school, even if the Minister has serious doubts about the way in which it is drawn up, about whether it has been properly considered, and about all its ramifications.

It is most important, at this stage, that Ministers have a reserve power to use their discretion. If the Secretary of State wants to accept a proposal, he may do so, but why should he not be provided with this power? It is not often that I argue that a Secretary of State ought to have more power than he has given himself, but in this case the protection of teachers and, more important, of pupils and future pupils is a most important consideration.

What is most important of all is that this legislation, after amendment, should provide a review body containing the basis of a teacher pay machinery that is permanent and acceptable, commands widespread support —we may yet get there with the Labour party—and has the confidence of the overwhelming majority of teachers. That will call for the greatest open-mindedness and the widest consultation. In that respect, the Government's record could not be worse. However, the future could be very good indeed if Ministers were prepared to open their minds to suggestions. Perhaps the best thing that could emerge from this debate is a statement of the willingness of Ministers to go into Committee with something that is absent from Minister in most Committees—open minds and a willingness to accept changes such as have been suggested today.

6.47 pm

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Essential to any modern debate on education reform must surely be the quality of our teachers and the remuneration of the profession, yet it seems to have taken a very long time to get to the stage we have now reached. The responsibility for that delay is, in large part, a result of the fact that are six different teaching unions representing one profession, and of the inability of those unions, particularly in the mid-1980s, to achieve any consensus on negotiated pay settlements. The result was a strike-ridden profession with warring factions which has damaged not only pupils but also the profession. Many teachers have had difficulty recovering from this damage.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) seemed almost to advocate such a lack of consensus—a return to the problems that we saw in the mid-1980s. That would be a retrograde step. If the unions have not been able to agree between themselves, it is hardly surprising that the Government have been faced with a dilemma in deciding how best to approach the settlement of teachers' pay and conditions, and to restore teachers to their rightful place in the community, where the majority will command the respect that they deserve. That is undoubtedly the aim of this Bill. It is not before time, and I welcome it.

Three key factors are vital if our education standards are to be improved. We have heard a lot lately about education. One of the key factors must be an improvement in teachers' morale and an emphasis on professionalism. Secondly, there must be recognition of the benefits of traditional teaching methods, not least in respect of reading, writing and arithmetic. We ought to be able to take these essential foundations for granted. Alas, reports still show that we cannot assume that all teachers are providing them.

The third ingredient is the regular assessment of pupils throughout their school life. Our children are the country's future, and we entrust their future to the capable hands of well-qualified teachers. What is Britain's future in a fiercely competitive Europe if we fail to guarantee all our pupils the best teachers and the best state education?

[Mrs. Maureen Hicks]

Over the past 10 years, the Government have examined teaching methods and the assessment of pupils, despite continuous Labour opposition and opposition from some teachers. We Conservatives understand what teachers want and what parents want. We have been determined to act in the best interests of parents and their children. We have not considered sufficiently, and nor have previous Governments, how best to recognise the essential role that is played by teachers in achieving the aims that we have set for them. I agree that in the past few years these aims have been various but vital to our reforms, and have invariably necessitated change.

For too long, declining standards in our schools were ignored, and the rot was allowed to set in. I am sure that we all recognise that a mammoth force was required to bring about change. We could not allow a vociferous minority of militant teachers to try to undermine proposals and to stand in the way of the better future of our pupils that the Government are determined to implement.

Only this Easter, the National Union of Teachers again raised its ugly head and threatened to ensure that our children would not have the assessments that they require, but the falling membership of the NUT—from 259,000 in 1984 to 213,000 in 1989—speaks volumes on behalf of the disenchanted professionals who, I believe, share our sentiments. They have not wished to be shown in the bad light of the NUT. We have heard the NUT's verdicts on the pay review body—

"We are totally opposed. It is quite terrifying."

I find it terrifying that it sees the pay review body as terrifying. I am worried that its members are in charge of our children.

The verdicts of the NUT must be compared with those of the Professional Association of Teachers. The association stated:

"Burying pay bargaining for teachers"—

I hope that the hon. Member for Hillsborough will listen to this carefully—

"is the best news since slavery was abolished in this country. Annual pay bargaining has never done anything for the professional image of teachers. Teachers want to be treated as professionals. That is now going to happen."

Allied to the debate on teachers' pay and the review body must be the debate on appraisal. We must be guaranteed that teachers deserve the review body and in fairness to our competent and dedicated teachers—I have thousands of them in my constituency—I would have introduced teacher assessment long before pupil assessment. It is essential that we identify teachers who need more assistance. If we fail to do so, pupils will suffer unnecessarily.

At last a Government have recognised the need for a review body and the compulsory appraisal of all teachers. To have left the decision in the hands of local authorities —some of them are in favour of appraisal, and some are not—would have been folly. Despite teacher shortages in some subjects, we should be mindful that we must recruit and retain the best teachers. We must not hang on to teachers merely for the sake of keeping up numbers. My experience in many aspects of education has taught me all too often that the teachers who have so much about them are the very ones who are motivated to get out of the profession and to stay out. We must retain the competent teachers, and we must recognise the merits of advising the incompetent. We do no favours by turning a blind eye to someone who is not cut out for teaching.

If we are to examine the payment of teachers and their terms and conditions, parents will want to be reassured that we shall continue to scrutinise teacher training methods in our colleges to ensure that the "progressives" no longer teach our teachers, who then teach our children, in a rather "progessive" way that does not lead to the best results, as we have seen.

We must be assured that those who want to become teachers have their aptitude for teaching closely and carefully assessed. The question that is still being asked is whether it is too easy to become a teacher. Only in the ways that I have outlined can we raise the status of the profession, and that is the aim of the review body.

The true professionals will surely recognise and welcome the new pay review body, which will not work within any predetermined financial constraints. In addition to pay settlements, it will consider terms and conditions of service. Such a body will recognise for the first time, I believe, the status of teachers. Those of us who visit schools regularly know how demoralised teachers have felt. The Government have kept to their word, and have said that they will give recognition to the value that they place in them.

It is almost unbelievable that the Opposition do not wish to put teachers on a par with other professionals. Surely teachers will be staggered when they learn that the Opposition think that they, teachers, should not be given equal treatment with dentists, doctors, nurses, architects and judges, for example, who all have their own pay review body. What is wrong with teachers? Do they not deserve the same treatment? The Government's proposals will take teachers back to where they belong.

How often have we heard Labour Members criticising us for reducing the morale of teachers? When we are given the opportunity to improve teachers' morale, the Opposition choose to oppose the introduction and implementation of a pay review body. I should like to see a return to the days when teachers were seen as pillars of the community, people who should be applauded and respected. I look forward to the time when a parent can be proud to say that his child will become a teacher. Nowadays, we hear people reject that ambition, and that is a sad reflection of the state that we have reached.

Five out of six teaching unions have recognised the opportunity offered them by the Government. The Bill paves the way by recognising that motivated and good classroom teachers should be rewarded. Seven out of every 10 secondary teachers and half of all primary teachers receive an incentive allowance of some sort. With our reforms of local management of schools and grant-maintained status, we are introducing much greater flexibility. Last week, for example, we heard of a comprehensive school in Bromley that wants to reward its good teachers. In other words, it wishes to ensure that its teachers maintain a standard, which will ensure a certain level of motivation and dedication. Provided that each teacher comes up to standard, I hope that he or she will receive £1,000 in performance-related pay on top of his or her incentive allowances and basic salary.

What is wrong with that? For too long we have worked within too narrow a framework. I am pleased that the Government are opening so many opportunities, but progress could be increased by an examination of

inner-city areas. We used to encourage teachers into areas where they would work under a great deal of stress, and it is sad that the educational priority allowances are no longer paid. I recognise that teachers working in socially deprived areas are often some of our best teachers. If they worked in a school two or three miles away in the greener suburbs, they would receive the same salary as they are receiving in the deprived area. The pay review body should consider whether we should give greater rewards to teachers working in socially deprived areas.

I had hoped tonight to hear what the Labour party intends to do. The Labour party has told us on many occasions that it will place education high on its agenda. I despair of the Labour party, because it has opposed every reform to improve standards and to give parents greater choice and it now opposes a pay review body for teachers. I pray to God that the Labour Government never get their hands on my children. If there were a Labour Government, people would be remortgaging their homes to ensure that they could take their children out of state schools and get them into independent schools. That is a frightening prospect.

The Labour party has said much about the right to strike. What about the right to professionalism? In their opposition to this Bill, the Opposition are out of date and out of touch with the aspirations and desires of the majority of our teachers. The Opposition also talk about spending. We are all aware of the Labour Government's record on spending. Under Labour, teachers' pay rose by a measly 6 per cent. We have increased teachers' pay by 30 per cent. although I hope that the pay review body will recognise that there is room for improvement.

Teachers know that under a Labour Government they would not have the opportunity of a pay review body and would not receive more money or improved conditions. The Labour party has learnt nothing. I am delighted to say that we are now topping off our reforms with one of the most vital ingredients to restore the status of teachers. I shall be proud to support the Bill in the Lobby tonight. Opposition Members will trail across the Floor of the House towards the No Lobby.

Because I believe in our teaching profession, I shall vote for the pay review body, and I believe that the majority of teachers will recognise the Government's good sense.

7.2 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): The speech by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) just about sums up the Tory party and its attitude to education and why the teaching profession is so depressed and has such low morale today.

The Bill is more about the level of local taxes and in particular the poll tax over the next few years, and the review of local government structure, than it is about teachers' pay and conditions. The Government, and in particular the present Secretary of State for Education and Science, frankly do not give a damn about state education, the teachers or their pay and conditions. I wonder whether the Secretary of State cares about state education at all.

I prepared my speech last night. However, I was amazed when I read an account of the recent statement made by the Secretary of State for Education and Science to a women's magazine, reported in this morning's *Northern Echo*. Now I know that he does not give a damn about education.

The Bill is simple in comparison to the first Bill that was rushed through Committee earlier this year. It was rushed through because we were told that the Government were keen to introduce machinery to give negotiating rights back to teachers. Like the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), I believe that the Government have handled teachers' pay and conditions in a shoddy way. They have deceived Parliament.

Education, like everything else, is in a mess. The profession is demoralised. It is working its fingers to the bone, but it is being kicked in the teeth by the Government. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) and I agree that the Government are doing a grave disservice to education. The Government are trying to destroy comprehensive education and the state system.

I want to quote the editorial of the *Northern Echo*—which is not often supportive of the Labour Party—because I believe that it sums up education under the Tories, particularly under the present Secretary of State for Education and Science. It states:

"Mr. Clarke has managed to whip up one controversy after another over Britain's schools. First it was the 'date-capping' of history, a nonsensical move to stop the teaching of anything which has happened during a child's own lifetime. Recently he dropped the rules introduced by Kenneth Baker in 1988 which prevented opted-out schools becoming grammar schools within five years. Now they can become selective as soon as they want. His theory is that it gives parents a choice of what school they want for their children. In practice, it will doubtless allow the governors a choice of whose children they don't want in their schools. Now Mr. Clarke has launched an attack on those Members of Parliament who send their children to state schools to further their own careers—in other words, he reckons that the state system cannot hold a candle to the independent sector and his opponents should realise it. Mr. Clarke thus reveals deep hostility to the notion of a universal and free education system of which he is the custodian. He says that he has never met anyone who would not have sent their child to an independent school if they could afford it. Such comments show the extent to which the head of our state school system is out of touch with the state. It is true that many parents are considering giving their children a private education—and more in the North are doing so. But this has as much to do with their growing concern about the quality of state education as their alleged confidence in the private sector. And that concern is hardly surprising when the minister responsible for our schools writes them off as second rate."

That just about sums up the Secretary of State's attitude to education.

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Member is developing a thesis in which he claims that Conservative Members do not use the state education system, and that is of course nonsense. I for one use it. Does he accept that Conservative local education authorities such as Harrow and Barnet produce decent results, while Labour authorities such as the late and unlamented Inner London education authority produce pretty awful results?

Mr. Steinberg: I can speak only for my local education authority and the authorities about which I am aware. I am proud to send my kids to a state school. I do not need the independent sector. A headline in the press this morning read "Labour Children are Sacrificed." My kids have never been sacrificed. My daughter went to Belmont school, the local comprehensive. She then went to Framwellgate Moor, which is a good school in Durham, where she took her O and A-levels. She is now studying law at Nottingham. That is not failure, and my daughter was not sacrificed for the sake of the independent sector.

[Mr. Steinberg]

I have no qualms about sending my children to the state system, but I wonder how many Government Front-Bench Members have qualms about sending theirs to the state system.

Because the Government are putting the dogma of the marketplace into education, schools are being forced to compete with one another for students. They are getting less and less money—unless, of course, they opt out of local education control or they are city technology colleges. The private sector has been expanded both openly through the assisted places scheme and deviously with schools being encouraged to be selective by back-door methods.

The whole country is worried about our education system, which has become a major political issue, and naturally and rightly so. Without a well-educated population, we cannot compete with our European counterparts. While our European partners and rivals invest in education and training, what do our Government do? They test seven-year-olds. It is vital that more resources are devoted to education in our schools. Higher standards can be achieved only by having high-quality teachers. What do we have? We have schools that are falling down, severe teacher shortages with few high-quality people entering the profession, and many good teachers leaving the profession.

Many teachers are demoralised by the poor esteem in which they are held. Many work under great pressure in under-resourced schools. Their professional competence is questioned time and again by the Government and by members of the Conservative party. The work load of teachers has increased dramatically with the introduction of the national curriculum and standard assessment tasks. The lack of time and resources only adds to the pressure on teachers. Teachers feel absolutely overwhelmed.

Very recently, I received a letter from Mrs. Warburton, the head teacher of an infant school in Durham, Belmont County infants school. She said:

"When I was appointed as Head Teacher of this school in 1989 I was given to understand that LMS would not concern schools of this size until after 1994. 'Good'—I thought—'Time to implement the National Curriculum, get used to Assessment, then when all this is up and running I'll have time to devote to managing a budget.' Alas, it was not to be.

The work load is almost unmanageable. One feels that one cannot do one job properly because there are so many other urgent demands. The most unfortunate effect I feel is that I am losing touch with what is happening in the classrooms —I have so very little time to spend there—I know it is not my job to teach as such, yet how can I make decisions and advise the staff if I do not have contact with the children? . . . We are more than happy to accept extra relevant work which will enable our pupils to realise their full potential. But is spending my time in an office with mountains of paperwork and insufficient clerical staff hours relevant to the education of these pupils? I'm afraid I feel that some sort of it is not, and that my training is being wasted."

She said that in the past couple of weeks she and her staff have felt depressed. They wonder what is the point. They cannot see the credit for the good job that they are doing. That is typical of virtually every teacher in the country today. Every teacher feels overworked, underpaid and depressed because of the Government.

To add to all that, most telling is the way in which teachers' pay has fallen in relation to average earnings. The Government claim that teachers' pay has risen dramatically. The earnings of other occupations with which teaching must compete have risen far faster. The Government point to the period since the abolition of teachers' negotiating rights and the introduction of the interim advisory committee in 1987. According to evidence that was given by the Department of Education and Science to the Select Committee, teachers' salaries were 116 per cent. of average non-manual earnings. The first phase of implementation of the 1990 pay award saw it fall to 104 per cent. By the end of the second stage of the award, it had fallen to 97 per cent.

To reinstate the position that teachers had in 1987 would have required an additional 13·8 per cent. To bring it back to the levels that were laid down by Houghton in 1974 would have needed an extra 40 per cent. However, in 1991, what do teachers actually receive? The IAC recommended a pay increase of 8·4 to 10·1 per cent. for the teaching profession and that teachers should receive 9 per cent. from 1 April 1991. The Secretary of State said that he accepted that in full. As we all know, that is a con because he has implemented the rise from 1 April at 7·5 per cent. and a further 1·5 per cent. from 1 December. In other words, not only have teachers not caught up to the 1987 or 1974 levels but they are now £1·50 a week worse off for every £100 that they earn until 1 December. That is a further erosion of their salaries and the result of a pay settlement that has been imposed on teachers.

Mr. John Marshall: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has lost not only me but all hon. Members in his comments about absolutes and relativities. However, does he accept that teachers' pay has gone up substantially in real terms? If he says that other professions have done even better, does not that underline the fact that all real incomes in this country have risen substantially since 1979?

Mr. Steinberg: I ask the hon. Gentleman to ask many people in the teaching profession, and in many other professions for that matter, whether their wages have increased in real terms since 1987 or 1979. We have only to ask them how much more they pay for their mortgages in 1991 than they paid in 1979. Teachers and members of other professions in the public sector have dropped further and further behind, with teachers being in a worse position than the majority of other workers.

We cannot recruit and retain teachers, either now or in future, when their salaries are so uncompetitive. In that context, great importance attaches to the way in which teachers' remuneration and conditions of service will be determined in future. The original School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill was bad, and I said so on many occasions on Second Reading and in Committee. However, at least it provided teachers with the opportunity to negotiate with their employers. This Bill takes that right from them.

The No. 2 Bill is appalling. It introduces a pay review body which by definition denies the right to free collective bargaining between employers and employees. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) and I have said, the International Labour Organisation has twice upheld complaints from the National Union of Teachers that the Government's withdrawal of teachers' negotiating rights breached its convention on free collective bargaining to which the British Government are a signatory.

Despite the ILO's call for the Government to make arrangements for teachers' pay to be determined by

collective bargaining, the Government have refused to comply with that international ruling. The Bill makes it absolutely clear that the Government have no intention of restoring schoolteachers' negotiating rights. To address the current problems of recruitment, retention and the work load of the teacher, it is vital for direct negotiations to take place between employers and teachers.

Employers have experience and understanding of the implications of changes to teachers' pay and conditions that would be lacking in a Government-appointed body. I completely reject the principle of a review body at the expense of negotiating rights. There cannot be any confidence in pay review bodies when the findings of similar bodies for nurses, doctors, dentists, paramedical staff, the armed forces, senior civil servants and members of the judiciary have been modified in seven out of the past eight years. The only time the Government made no variations in the recommendations or findings of the review bodies was in 1987—and we all know what happened in 1987.

Under the Bill, the Prime Minister is to appoint the review body and its chairman. How can that be seen as independent? To make matters worse, the Secretary of State for Education and Science then directs the review body and determines what can be referred to it, giving the teachers and their employers no opportunity to raise matters of national importance or significance to the profession. How can that be independent? Having set up the body, the Secretary of State reserves the right to ignore its recommendations and then, independently, autocratically and autonomously, makes other provision "as he thinks fit".

To make matters worse, and just in case all that has not castrated the review body sufficiently, in consultation with the chairman—remember, he has been appointed by the Prime Minister—the Secretary of State can bypass the procedure completely; and all that after the Secretary of State told the Select Committee on Education and Science a few weeks ago that he did not meddle in the running of schools. He has now given himself the power to intervene in any school on staffing matters, payments for teachers or changes in teachers' conditions of service.

Clause 3 builds in what I suspect is the real purpose of the Bill—the encouragement of school-by-school arrangements. With continual Government pressure for schools to opt out, I suspect that it is intended that the review body shall be an interim body, with local education authorities eventually disappearing from sight.

Thus I find the Bill dishonest—the hidden agenda remains totally hidden. The Bill is about the control of education. It is about giving the opportunity for central control of strategic policy, coupled with a denial of the right of proper negotiation at any level on pay and conditions. Despite what Conservative Members have said, that can lead only to continued frustration for the teaching profession, causing greater recruitment and retention problems in the long run.

Where are the real changes in the proposals from what happens now with the present interim advisory committee? Frankly, as I read the Bill, there are no changes at all. Everything will be exactly the same, but given a different name. Yet again, the Government have broken their promises.

The consultations of the past three years on the restoration of negotiating rights have meant absolutely nothing. As I said earlier in an intervention, only a few months ago Ministers were arguing for the restoration of negotiating rights—albeit that it was flawed—but now, presumably next week when the Bill is in Committee, Ministers will argue against the restoration of negotiating rights. They do not know where they are.

Like the entire Government and the majority of Conservative Members, Ministers are absolutely shell-shocked. We have had Bill No. 1 on this and Bill No. 2 on that. We have had so many U-turns over the past 12 months that this place looks more like Brands Hatch or Silverstone than the place from which the Government run the country. The truth is that this Government are no longer fit to govern. They continually get things wrong. They do one thing, but shortly afterwards have to change it because of the mess that they made.

Whatever the Secretary of State may say, this is a time of severe teacher shortages. Recruitment and retention are crucial and the profession's morale is at an all-time low. How many of us have visited schools in our constituencies only to hear teachers say, "Thank God I have reached the age when I can apply for early retirement"? Only last week, a group of sixth formers came down to visit me from a school in Durham. The teacher with them said that he had now reached the age of 50 and, thank God, was leaving the profession. He said that he was sick to death of it and glad to get out. He knew that there was about to be a review body because I reminded him of it, but it did not seem to make him want to change his opinion.

The Bill serves to undermine education still further. The proposed legislation is totally unacceptable. We live in a society that subscribes to the principle of free collective bargaining between employer and employee, where a worker has the right to withdraw his labour and to take industrial action. The Secretary of State implied that the pay review body would be dependent on a no-strike agreement. If I were still a teacher, I would never have given that guarantee. I would not forfeit my democratic rights, and I believe that many teachers will agree with my sentiment. I totally reject the proposal for a pay review body at the expense of free collective bargaining and the restoration of teachers's negotiating rights.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to detain you, but we have just heard a rather long speech. Do you agree that there may be a case for imposing the 10-minute rule between now and 9 o'clock to allow more of us to speak? *[Interruption.]* The Opposition have had their say.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am getting slightly anxious about the length of speeches and the number of hon. Members who still wish to speak. I hope that those who are fortunate enough to be called will bear that in mind.

7.25 pm

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): I shall endeavour to avoid causing you any anxiety, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Bill is very good for the teaching profession and therefore for education. It is eminently reasonable and fair, and it is sad but significant to see the Opposition thrashing about rather unconvincingly to try to find reasons to oppose it. What do the Opposition put first—the right of one union to undertake industrial actions, or the educational future of our youngsters?

[Mr. Alan Amos]

With the many other hon. Members who have welcomed the Government's proposals in the Bill, I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on the flexibility, insight and common sense that he has shown in responding to a changed situation, and having the guts to put into effect a measure that deserves to be welcomed by everybody who genuinely has the best interests of both teachers and school children at heart.

Let there be no doubt—this is a watershed in our educational system. The main thrust of the new proposals is to bestow a level of professionalism and status on teachers that they totally deserve. What could be more laudable than to raise the professional status of the teaching force by determining their pay and conditions via an independent review body—I stress the word "independent"—reporting direct to the Prime Minister, in exactly the same way as we handle doctors, dentists, nurses, the armed forces, senior civil servants, and judges?

The review body will be comprehensive in its scope and impartial in its decisions. Its main task will be to establish a system that will recruit and retain good teachers and thereby build upon the already much improved career structure introduced by the Government in recent years. There will be no cash limit or predetermined financial constraint upon the deliberations of the review body, but the Secretary of State must, of course, lay down certain guidelines and other considerations in the national interest. All interested bodies, including the employers, will be consulted and evidence taken from a very wide range of organisations. There will not even have to be a 'no strike agreement'.

I do not believe that any reasonable group of people could seriously argue that these conditions are in any way onerous or unfair, or against their interests. The fact is that the other review bodies work very well and the staff involved have never expressed any desire to get rid of them. All the groups covered in this way are professions and I maintain that strike action is inherently incompatible with the status of professionals. Strikes and other forms of action are the proper and legitimate tools of industrial unions, not of groups such as teachers. We want teachers to be professionals, and we intend to treat them as such.

The other reason why all teachers should welcome the establishment of an independent review body is that review body recommendations are usually implemented in full, although occasionally phased in over a short transitional period. Under clause 2, the Secretary of State will also have a fair amount of flexibility in the way in which he can give effect to the body's recommendations.

In addition, I commend clause 5(3), which will sensibly avoid any misunderstanding about what are, and what are not, extra-curricular responsibilities. In any case, the Bill makes it clear that negotiations between local education authorities and teachers can still take place on non-statutory conditions of employment.

A review body will raise the importance of any settlement on pay and conditions to a higher level than any amount of collective bargaining could. In taking evidence from all interested bodies, a full hearing and full consideration will be given to the complete spectrum of teaching concerns. The days when not only the country but the future of our children was held to ransom by the whims and prejudices of the more militant teaching unions is at an end. It has been claimed that the right to strike has been removed from the teaching profession, and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred to

"the . . . removal of the right to strike which the statement implies."

The facts do not bear that out. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman would realise if he were in his seat, there is no intention to write a no strike clause into the Bill. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said earlier that that was the case, and when he responded to the hon. Member for Blackburn on 17 April he said of the right to strike:

"We are not going to take away that right by law."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 435-36.]

So let us squash that bogus argument once and for all.

In any case, why can Opposition Members not accept that, in treating teachers as a profession, it is fair to expect them to reciprocate? By insisting on an absolute right to take industrial action, they are refusing to accept that sensible and professional decisions can be reached by an independent body. The Opposition must accept that teachers can make intelligent decisions that do not rely on the fear and destructive nature of industrial action. Let there be no doubt that the only people who suffer from industrial action are the children who are too often left to cope with public exams and decisions on their future without the help and backing from the striking teachers who are more concerned with obtaining a few more pounds in their pay packets than helping the children in their care. I am proud to say that, when I was a teacher in a state comprehensive, I refused to take any form of industrial action.

Indeed, the unions and most teachers have had a pay review body for a long time. Pay review is supported by five out of the six recognised teacher bodies. The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers has warmly welcomed the proposals and has given them strong support, as has the Secondary Heads Association, the Professional Association of Teachers and the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association. In a letter sent to a number of my colleagues today, AMMA says that it welcomes

"the recognition of school teachers' professional commitment now offered by Ministers".

It also says that AMMA

"greatly welcome the basis upon which the Secretary of State has brought forward this new proposal."

Only NUT officials seem to be opposed to the plans. Why can the Opposition not accept that these proposals are what the teachers themselves want, and that Labour can no longer impose strike action, through its union friends, on teachers who do not want it? Those days are over. Why do the Opposition insist on refusing to listen to what teachers want, and what is in their best interests?

It is significant that the teacher organisations that support a review body are all associations: NAS, SHA, PAT and AMMA. It is opposed only by the National Union of Teachers, which shows a difference of emphasis and outlook by the unions.

The Opposition are obsessed with collective bargaining and with industrial action. They want to impose the negotiating rights of an industrial trade union onto a professional body. The teaching profession will gain much more from an independent review body than any number of negotiating rights. In the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill, the Government have shown the desire to

reconsider new proposals. It would have been easier for the Government to have pressed ahead with the original Bill. There is no reason to stick to the original proposals when the opportunity for a better one comes along, and especially one that the teachers themselves want. Most important of all, the work of the existing review bodies has ensured that the other professions have kept up in real terms. That is an essential fact.

When one looks at the Government's proud record on education during the past 12 years, one can clearly see that, in any case, there is absolutely no need for industrial action and strikes. Between 1979 and 1990, the pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools improved from 23·1 to 22·0 and in secondary schools from 16·7 to 15·3. Government spending over the same period in real terms is up from £22·2 billion to £25·1 billion; spending per capita in nursery and primary schools, again in real terms, is up from £943 to £1,100, an increase of 15 per cent.; in secondary schools it is up from £1,327 to £1,690, a significant increase of 22 per cent.; and the number of school leavers with five or more GCSEs, or equivalents, is the highest ever at 31·9 per cent., and the figure for the percentage of 18-year-olds achieving one or more A-level passes, at 17·6 per cent. is also the highest yet.

What the independent pay review body offers is exactly what teachers want—a recognition of their status and a commensurate financial reward—a professional means of dealing with pay and conditions. As a teacher in a state comprehensive school for eight years, I know that to be the case. The nature of a teacher's job is of necessity undergoing a fundamental and long overdue change, both in what is taught and how it is taught: the national curriculum, local management, standardised testing, teacher appraisal and so on. All these place extra burdens and responsibilities on the teaching force. We are asking them to be more professional, better trained and more highly qualified, skilled and flexible. I am therefore pleased that we are now setting up the machinery by which we will recognise that fact. As a former chairman of an education committee, I remember only too well the regular, predictable prolonged chaos and uncertainty under the old free-for-all negotiating chaos of the Burnham committee. It was an absolute shambles. The interim advisory committee has done a lot of good work, but it was never a full or permanent solution to this matter.

Because local councils run education and spend the money, but central Government pay the bills, we have a structure in which accountability and responsibility are a mess. The review body will elevate teachers' pay and conditions on to a much simpler and more professional level, and that is why I fully support the Bill.

I pay tribute to the vast majority of the teachers in my constituency, whom I have met as I go round visiting the schools, who maintain a good standard of discipline and produce good public examination results. They are dedicated, want to make a success of the reforms, want to get on with their jobs, and be treated as professionals. They want nothing to do with the trade union-minded militant minority of left-wing trouble makers and union officials who, by their behaviour and repeated industrial action year in and year out in recent years, have undermined the whole profession. That is something that the Government are now putting right.

7.31 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I agree with the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) in his warm tribute to teachers, who have, in the main, remained loyal professionals and have continued the difficult task of educating our children through the many changes that they have undergone during a turbulent and difficult period. However, I take issue with him when he describes the Government's record in the past decade as "proud". Teaching has been turbulent and difficult, and it has not been recognised as a profession.

I welcome the change in emphasis towards teachers and the recognition of teaching as a profession. I welcome the implicit commitment to acknowledge their status and to improve their pay. In that spirit, I welcome the pay review body.

Earlier in the debate, hon. Members were vying with one another about their credentials, saying who had experienced state education and whose children were being educated in the state system. My credentials are impeccable. I was educated in the state system and my children are being educated in that system in London, where it has been undergoing an especially difficult time following the break up of the Inner London education authority. Education at both sixth-form secondary level and primary level—as I know from the experience of my three children—has survived only because of the dedication and professionalism of the many teachers who have stayed the course.

That is not to say that I have not observed periods of intense disruption as a result of the industrial action of three or four years ago. I think that some of the problems now experienced by sixth forms in London are a direct consequence. During their second, third and fourth years of secondary education, some children lost contact with their school and their teachers, and have never regained it.

Some parents, of course, have the commitment—and, perhaps, the money—to enable their children to retake their exams, and to stay the course by patching things up with extra French lessons and so forth. Not all of them have the commitment or the wherewithal to do so, however, and other children have paid the price of the appalling disruption that we saw a few years ago. That is why I am wholeheartedly committed to any action that removes teachers from the striking arena: such action can only be to the good.

Many teachers—including many of the better ones—have lost heart and left the profession in recent years. Although I have criticised the Government's education record, I can honestly say that I have seen as many teachers leave as a result of the excesses of the ILEA. I supported reform of the ILEA rather than its abolition, but I know that the task of teachers has been made near-impossible by the pressure imposed by wayward local education authorities in some areas, and by their unacceptable interventions in the form of "isms" from here, there and everywhere. We must devise a suitable pay mechanism, which will attract and retain teachers of the right calibre and ensure that they stay.

The SDP has long been committed to the establishment of a pay review body. As early as 1985, we advocated in a Green Paper that a system should be set up to determine public sector pay, which would be recognised as fair and which would keep public sector groups broadly in line with their private sector counterparts. Our main concern then,

[Mrs. Rosie Barnes]

as now, was that the system should be independent, and that disagreements should be settled through arbitration. We hoped that that would be accompanied by a no industrial action agreement, into which the teachers would enter freely for recognition of their professional status.

That is the right approach, and it is long overdue. I must emphasise, however, that I believe that it would work much better in the context of a general teaching council, which has already been mentioned this evening. We need a self-regulatory body of teachers and for teachers, to monitor standards, approve training, adjudicate and raise professional standards.

Although I consider the attraction and retention of teachers of the right calibre a vital ingredient, and although I firmly believe that structural changes achieve nothing unless those teachers are in place, I also think that some of the structural changes in the pipeline will prove detrimental.

We did not support the Education Reform Act 1988, for two reasons. First, as I have said, we advocated the reform rather than the abolition of the ILEA. Secondly, for reasons closely connected with today's debate, we had grave reservations about grant-maintained schools—especially because we could not obtain a reassurance from the then Secretary of State that grant-maintained status would not be used as a way of returning to selectivity. The last thing I want is a return to the old secondary modern and grammar school system.

That is not to say, however, that I do not believe that mistakes were made in the comprehensive system. I do not want to stray too far from the subject of the debate, but let me throw an idea into the melting pot. I believe that the comprehensive schools failed because we made them much too large. We did that so that each school would generate a viable sixth form; the old grammar schools attracted less than a third of the pupils.

The comprehensives failed all round. They were too large to accommodate children aged 11, 12 and 13; the children lost contact with their teachers; headmasters did not know individual pupils; and they failed in their essential task of creating viable sixth forms. It is now all too common for London comprehensives, even the largest, to form consortia and seek sixth form college arrangements to try to make their sixth forms work. I think that it would have been much better for the comprehensive system if we had aimed for schools for 11 to 16-year-olds, along with tertiary colleges. Then the comprehensives would not have had to be so large.

Young people change. At 16, they are in many ways too old to want to be schoolchildren, while not being old enough to enter an adult college. A break from school at the age of 16 would allow them to enter an environment that would be halfway between school and college.

I know to my cost—and I have talked to many other parents who feel the same—that it is too much to ask 16 to 19-year-olds to be given too much responsibility. It is too much to expect them always to know where they should be, and to be there when no one else will know whether they are there or not. At that age, young people develop interests outside their studies, and, if they lose track of school or school loses track of them, they have not the motivation or the commitment to complete the A-level or further education studies.

Not only are too few pupils staying on because of the present system; many others are falling by the wayside. It would, I think, be a great pity if the testing that I have tentatively approved were used to reintroduce selectivity at the age of 11, but testing has a vital part to play. If a general teaching council were established, teachers would, as a body, accept the principles entailed in conducting those tests and using them sensibly.

Next week and the week after, I shall see seven-year-olds being tested at school, and shall be able to judge for myself. Judging by my preliminary conversations with teachers, however, I believe that their anxieties focus not on the nature of testing or on whether it is right, but on the fact that they are not receiving the support in their schools that would release them from their duty to teach the rest of the class. For several days—perhaps weeks—they will be dealing with small groups of children, putting them through the tests. Head teachers and supply teachers are having to be diverted.

What else can be done to improve the staying-on rate? That is an important part of the overall question. It is a travesty that we are now lower in the league tables than countries such as Korea and Thailand; there can be no justification for that. I urge the Government to reconsider the introduction of education maintenance allowances for 16 to 19-year-olds, many of whom are in no man's land, where financial support from their parents is uncertain. If the parent is on income support, that dries up for them and young people find it impossible to continue their education.

I welcome the pay review body. I should prefer an independent general teaching council. I should also prefer arbitration. However, we have taken a major step in the right direction.

7.49 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I listened with great interest to the balanced speech of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). I was particularly interested in what she had to say about education for 16 to 19-year-olds. It is tempting to develop my ideas on that subject. I must admit that, for some time, I have been enthusiastic about a professional teachers' council that would be not too far removed from a general teaching council. That subject has been raised in all parts of the House at various times during the debate. The most important point to come out of the hon. Lady's speech is that she and her colleagues support the idea of a pay review body for teachers. It was perfectly clear from the speech of the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) that he and his colleagues also support the idea.

The most extraordinary feature of the debate so far is the total confusion in the ranks of the Labour party. I am not at all clear what the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) meant. Later in the debate, perhaps it will be made clear. However, what is clear is that some Labour Opposition Members are totally opposed to these ideas. In their case, at least I understood their arguments; otherwise, confusion seems to reign.

The main reason for my participation in the debate is to support what my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) said. He said that this is one of the most important developments in education for some time. Since I, together with many of my colleagues, have been arguing for a pay review body for teachers, I can only regard this

as one of the pleasantest opportunities to speak in a debate that I can recall. This is a good step, and I support it 100 per cent.

It was extraordinary to hear some Labour Opposition Members—for example, the hon. Members for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery)—state at great length that they were not arguing for a return to the chaotic Burnham negotiations, but that is precisely what they were arguing for. There is no way in which they or their National Union of Teachers colleagues can pretend otherwise. They want Burnham back.

I taught for 23 years. Burnham was not popular with teachers. It did not deliver a good deal for them. It was also counter-productive. My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby developed that theme, and there is no need for me to develop it further. We do not want to go back to Burnham. That is why I regard the Bill as a major step forward, which I strongly support.

The hon. Member for Truro said that the first School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill was a waste of time. I served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill, and I do not agree. I remember, together with a few of my colleagues, using the opportunity that the Bill afforded to develop the argument for an independent pay review body when the time was suitable. I must admit that at that time I did not realise that the suitable time would be quite so soon, but I do not complain about that.

What is even more important, in the context of the details of the Bill, is that, together with a number of my colleagues, I remember arguing that provision should be made for a consultation process within grant-maintained schools, if they should decide to dissociate themselves or separate themselves from the pay process. If I read it correctly, that provision is incorporated in clause 3.

What I hope will become clear when the Bill is debated in Committee is whether a measure of local pay bargaining will be allowed. I believe that there should be an independent pay review body, so I support the Bill. However, I see no reason why there should not be an element of local pay bargaining—for example, where special local conditions cause a shortage of teachers, or where there is a shortage of specialist teachers, or where there may be other good reasons for local pay bargaining. I hope that the Minister will say something about that when he winds up the debate.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I am interested in the consistency of the hon. Gentleman's speech. Earlier, he said that national pay negotiations would lead to conflict, and he equated bargaining with industrial action. At local level, however, he does not equate bargaining with industrial action. What is the difference?

Mr. Thompson: Having heard the speeches of some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, I doubt whether I shall be able to persuade him that I believe that there is no correspondence between the chaotic Burnham system, so well described by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby who had experience of it before he became a Member of Parliament, and a measure of local pay bargaining at school level. The important point is that I believe that it is right to move towards a pay review body. The other one is icing on the cake. I hope that I shall hear later from the Minister that, by some means or another, local pay bargaining can be introduced.

There is wide support for a pay review body. Individual teachers support it. They have done so for years. Moreover, the majority of the teachers' unions are in favour of the proposal. There is also widespread support for it on both sides of the House. Like my hon. Friends, I believe that this is the best opportunity that teachers have had in my lifetime to be regarded as a truly professional body. I cannot emphasise that point too strongly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) paid tribute to the many good teachers in his constituency. The majority of teachers are good professional people. They will no doubt welcome his encouragement for their professional status to be further enhanced. Those who do not act professionally will find that the measure helps to put that right, in that it will encourage them to be more professional.

I am delighted that the Bill also enables us to discuss strike action is schools. When I was a member of the teaching profession, many teachers never took industrial action and many who did took it reluctantly. They did not want to take industrial action, but they felt compelled to do so. It must be a good step forward if we can devise a system in which we move away from industrial action in our schools. That is why I so strongly support not just the Bill but the thinking behind it. It has come rather later than I should have liked, but now that it has finally arrived, I welcome it. Children should no longer have to experience strike action in their schools. It does them a disservice, and I support the Secretary of State's proposal.

I hope that one small point will be considered when teachers' pay is debated, either now or later. I support those who have already said that, in considering teachers' pay, we should deal in particular with the pay of experienced classroom teachers. I cannot emphasise too much that it does our schools no good if our system encourages good classroom teachers to believe that they must become head teachers, deputy head teachers, local government officers or HMIs if they are to earn more money. That point was emphasised during an intervention. I strongly support those hon. Members who feel that it should be made worth their while for good teachers to stay in the classroom. They should not have to regard it as natural to get out of the classroom to earn more money for their families.

There has been much talk in the debate about the morale and status of the teaching profession. I do not intend to say a great deal about that, apart from pointing out that other countries have a similar problem. We must not be misled into believing that this is a peculiarly British problem. It is one that we share with our continental neighbours and with the United States of America.

I hope that the Bill is part of a package of measures to address the problem of teachers' morale, status and professionalism, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will use this opportunity to examine teacher training. I recently spoke to one or two young people who have attended teacher training colleges, as a result of which some of them gave up the idea of teaching.

I have always thought that my view of teacher training was rather archaic. Perhaps I am prejudiced, but I still believe that trendy ideas are too much to the fore, that there is political indoctrination in teacher training colleges and that many of the lecturers have an inadequate knowledge of the subject that they are supposed to be teaching. When one hears what goes on in many of our

[Mr. Thompson]

teacher training colleges, it is a shocking indictment. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will take some action.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does what the hon. Gentleman has just said represent simply his own feelings on the matter, or has he real evidence for his allegations? All the colleges running B.Ed. and postgraduate courses have been approved by the Department of Education and Science. If what the hon. Gentleman says is true, it is a serious matter, and specific colleges should be investigated.

Mr. Thompson: If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully, he would recall that I was wondering whether it was my own prejudice, although I had spoken to people who had been through the system and attended teacher training colleges over the years. I am not suggesting that all teacher training colleges are the same or that all lecturers are the same, but most people would agree that the overall picture is not good. Hon. Members' views may differ, but I am sure that they will agree that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who I am glad to see in his place, should take the earliest opportunity to examine what is going on in teacher training colleges.

As pay, curriculum reform and other matters that are central to the organisation of our education system are very much under the influence, if not the control, of my right hon. Friend, I suggest that, following the successful transfer to the centre of funding of polytechnics and further education colleges, we should look again at the role of local education authorities.

Since the recent debates on local government finance, the local education authorities expect changes and reform, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will not duck the challenge of that aspect of education. Labour local authorities have certainly failed in their administration of education. Labour Members have failed to explain their attitude to the Bill this evening, and recent statements show that the Labour party is still facing in the wrong direction on education.

The Bill is a breakthrough for those of us who want to enhance the quality, status and professionalism of teachers. I welcome it as a vital step towards a better education system, and I am delighted to give it 100 per cent. support.

8.3 pm

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Mid-Staffordshire): Nineteen eighty-eight was certainly a year for teachers to remember. It saw the introduction of the Education Reform Act and the demise of teachers' rights to collective bargaining and pay negotiations. Those two factors, and the decline in their relative pay and conditions of service, have had a considerable effect on teachers.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) referred to the disgraceful way in which Education Ministers treated the House in their handling of the previous Bill on teachers' pay. In endorsing his comments, I add that that was yet another example of the disgraceful way in which the Conservative Government and Education Ministers have treated the teaching profession.

Having spoken to teachers and head teachers in my constituency, I want to talk about the real views, concerns and conditions of those working in education. Low morale related to pay and conditions is a major talking point among the teaching profession. All teachers I met referred to the Education Reform Act and the many demands that it has placed upon class teachers, heads of department, deputies and head teachers. They have all said that the changes have been too many and too fast.

They have all been critical of the mountains of paperwork they receive and their lack of time to cope with the new demands. They complain about the lack of time to prepare and plan for all the extras in the national curriculum as well as the daily demands of teaching—perhaps a class of 32 lively youngsters. The range of subjects and the methods of teaching mean that there are many practical activities which require much more planning and preparation.

Time is also a problem for head teachers. The introduction of local management of schools means that much of the administrative work previously undertaken by the local education authorities now has to be carried out by head teachers. They have to make time available for attending additional meetings of governors and sub-committees. They have to make time to deal with finance, although most of them are not and do not want to be accountants and administrators. Those additional responsibilities mean a reduction in the time available for head teachers to maintain contact with pupils and staff. They receive no additional payment or extra help.

When Labour politicians talk about teachers' morale, they are accurately reflecting what they have been told by those in the front line—the teachers at the chalk face, those working in the classrooms. The teachers I have spoken to are all struggling to maintain morale, and they rely mainly on one another to boost that morale. They feel undervalued and under stress. I make no apology for repeating what has already been said in the debate.

A general practitioner neighbour of mine speaks of diagnosing "Baker depression" among teachers. Regardless of who is the present Secretary of State, the originator of many of the problems was his predecessor, the current Home Secretary. We must now avoid any further lowering of morale as teachers have less control over their conditions of service and more leave the profession as a result.

Those in the profession are keen to maintain and improve the quality of education. Ministers are keen on talking about that, but if it is to be achieved, we require teachers who are professionally trained, who have self-esteem and who feel that they are valued. Conditions of service and working conditions are extremely important. The Labour party has often referred to our crumbling schools, in which the majority of children are taught and the majority of teachers work. Teachers face difficult conditions in the classroom and in what is available to help them to cope with the many problems of children in our schools today. Teachers have to deal not just with practical teaching problems but with the emotional difficulties that children, and therefore teachers themselves, have to face.

State schools are staffed by high-quality teachers and, despite the difficulties under which they work, the results they achieve are good. Teachers in Mid-Staffordshire and throughout the country want proper recognition of their professional training and skills and of the responsibility that we place on them to provide the motivation and education that this country desperately needs for its children.

Teachers have seen their pay decline in recent years, and have had no increase in real terms since 1987. The many teachers who leave the profession show their dissatisfaction with their pay and conditions of service. Issues relating to conditions of service are complicated, but a pay review does not negotiate but merely allocates.

Since 1988, there have been many unresolved problems for the teaching profession such as supply teachers' pay, cover duties and increments. It is therefore understandable that those who accept the review body instead of having their negotiating rights returned do so with reservations. It is understandable, too, when one considers the term "independent review body", but reads in the Bill the intervention powers that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have on composition and on the directives that can be given. Those comments were admirably made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg).

The teachers and children of this country deserve a better deal from this Government. The teachers of this country deserve a fair deal—and they certainly have not had one from the Conservative Administration.

8.11 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) mentioned school buildings. I agree that we need to make more rapid progress in improving them. I hope that the new council tax will lead to a more stable and fairer revenue support grant system that will stop pulling money from counties in the south, such as Bedfordshire, to those in the north without having regard, as the RSG has had, to the need for school buildings. Bedfordshire is somewhat behind, but I hope that the new system of council tax and of allocating resources will lead to the improvement for which Conservative Members and the hon. Lady have called.

I welcome the Bill, as an imaginative attempt to solve the issue of teachers' pay, after an extremely disturbed position in part of the past decade. I hope that the review body will remember that if, as I believe, we are heading for a decade of low inflation, there is no need to recommend a one-year deal for teachers' pay; it should be perfectly possible to recommend a two or three-year deal. Such deals are being made in parts of industry because they lead to greater stability and free management from time and negotiation. If the Government succeed in keeping inflation low, what works effectively for the private sector could easily work well for the public sector.

One of the review body's first tasks should be to consider how teachers' duties have been extended, what is expected of them and how the position has changed in the past 10 years. As has been said many times in the debate, there has been no lack of new initiatives since 1980, and there has been no education drift. There has been GCSE course work, the technical and vocational education initiative, the national curriculum, AS-levels and records of achievement, to name but a few. All those changes need time to show their importance, so we need time to measure thoroughly and accurately how successful they have been. A common thread has been the increase in non-teaching support to ensure that the initiatives succeed.

In deciding what to recommend on teachers' statutory conditions of employment, I hope that the review body will pay particular regard to the need carefully to consider how best to use teachers' time. We all want quality teaching, which includes lesson preparation, teaching, marking, examining and extra-curricular activities, but conditions of employment must recognise that teachers need time to think about the development of the curriculum and how they are planning their work. In the next 10 years, the development of the curriculum will be important for the improvement of education standards.

A modern industrial society will inevitably require the curriculum, particularly the science and technology part, to change. I welcome the fact that business is much more involved in the school curriculum and is putting forward its ideas. However, not only employers but the craft and skill unions have a contribution to make in suggesting how the curriculum should develop, and most certainly have a contribution to make in explaining how changes in the curriculum have affected work on the factory floor, especially in the skills that we need. I want the extension of the partnership between education and business to include the skill and craft trade unions. The pay review body must consider such matters, because at the heart of its work are the conditions of employment for teachers and development of the curriculum.

Clause 2 empowers the Secretary of State to give direction to the review body on the considerations to which they should have regard and the time within which they are required to report. I want to make a point about teachers' hours of work and education duties which, if considered sensibly by the review body, may lead to an improvement in classroom standards. Much evidence shows the importance of homework and that, if it is done properly and regularly, and if it is major aim and ethos of a school, it translates into a much better examination performance and creates improved classroom atmosphere. In many homes, it is simply not possible for young people to have the necessary peace and quiet, and freedom from interruption, to complete homework. Young people should be able voluntarily to stay on after school to do their homework, but that would require teacher-only supervision. It is no good imagining that volunteers could do the job; teachers would be needed.

I hope that, in its recommendations, the review body will recognise that a teachers' contract of employment may include a requirement to supervise homework at school and that we shall not have an argument between the profession, the review body and the Government on how far such duties extend. I stress that that would be voluntary and that it is impossible to say how many schools will take advantage of it, but in some parts of the country pupils are encouraged to stay at school to do their homework.

I hope that there will be increasing recognition that that is a good education practice. Such duties will be included in teachers' pay and conditions only if the review body says, "We recognise that teachers' hours could include such necessary supervision, and we shall therefore make such a recommendation to the Secretary of State."

There have been two main parental worries in the past decade. The first fear is of classroom disruption by teachers taking industrial action. That is now over. The Bill will seal peace among teachers, education authorities and the Government. The second fear is of classroom disruption by rowdy and anti-social pupils, which is a much more difficult problem with which to deal. The

[Mr. David Madel]

chances of dealing with it successfully are mightily improved if the teaching profession works with the community, the Government and interested parties.

Public education is a central civic function. To promote within the local authority sector a sensible balance between good school management and a fair allocation of resources is a central task of Government. The pay review body will ensure that there is a fair allocation of resources, which inevitably includes fair and reasonable salaries for teachers. I wish the Bill well. It will bring industrial peace throughout the education service.

8.20 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The first point we need to remember as we debate the Bill is that the Conservative party has been in power for 12 years. It has not suddenly been thrust into office, and it did not suddenly find that all these problems were building up because of a previous Administration. During the past decade or so, Conservative Administrations have failed to deal with education problems.

Dr. Hampson: I hesitate to intervene. Having been a Member for so long, I remember when Shirley Williams, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, talked about national curricula, but nothing was done. Instead, budgets were cut more heavily in 1976 under a Labour Government than at any other time since the war. The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that there is a long lead time in education. Translating plans into legislation, instituting systems in schools and training teachers probably takes 15 years. If anyone has responsibility, it is the Labour Government for the decisions they did not take and for the rotten decisions they did take.

Mr. Griffiths: I can hardly thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. At that time, I was a teacher. Education problems are far greater now, after 12 years of Conservative rule. I challenge the hon. Gentleman to come with me to any school, in my constituency or his, to ask teachers who have experienced education over that period what they think. The hon. Gentleman will be surprised at the answer, because it will not agree with his comments.

At the end of 12 years of Conservative government, we have chaos in the education system. Although some welcomed some aspects of the Government's reforms—for example, the national curriculum—teachers have been wringing their hands in despair at the way in which they are expected to carry them out and because of difficulties in terms of the number of subjects allocated and the testing originally envisaged. Teachers feel desperate when they consider how to ensure that the children in their charge are properly educated and to meet the demands of the testing which the Government introduced.

No wonder Her Majesty's inspectorate and the interim advisory committee give clear warnings about teachers' pay and conditions. The interim advisory committee's last report stated:

"We are in no doubt at all that teacher morale is lower than in our first two years".

The senior chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate said:

"too many teachers feel that their profession and its work are misjudged and seriously undervalued".

No hon. Member can say that the responsibility lies with decisions made in the mid-1970s. It lies with decisions made during the past decade. The difficulty in facing up to that problem led us to this debate.

During the latter part of the 1980s, teachers' pay lagged behind that of comparable groups. In October 1987, the starting salary of a graduate teacher was £10,330; today, it is £9,990. A teacher on incentive allowance B in October 1987 had a salary worth £17,390; today, it is worth £16,660. The value of a teacher's salary has decreased.

The review of the Government's education record by the infamous Carlton club's political committee stated:

"To put matters into perspective, teachers' salaries are:—

50 per cent. less than those of Medical Practitioners.
75 per cent. less than Accountants.
80 per cent. less than Civil Engineers.

It is a truism to state that a country only gets those professionals it is prepared to pay for. On the salaries now being paid to teachers it is, frankly, a wonder (and a huge testimony to their sense of vocation) that so many dedicated men and women remain in the profession."

That was the view of the people at the heart of the Conservative party, not of Labour local authorities or of those of the Labour Front Bench. If the Government cannot face up to that criticism, they cannot face up to any criticism.

The Carlton club's political committee stated:

"the Government should also recognise that it will win the respect of the public at large if it errs a little on the side of generosity in rewarding 'the better teacher'."

The political committee stated that there was a need for a

"thorough independent review of teachers' pay"

with a

"significant upgrading of teachers' pay".

All the evidence from the Opposition and even from the heart of the Tory party shows the need to pay teachers a decent wage so that they feel that the fine words lately showered on them mean something.

At the beginning of the debate, parents' commitment to the state education system was questioned. The Secretary of State said that anyone who read the *Daily Mirror* was a moron. I am sure that they are the words that the record will show tomorrow.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that they were the words, which were somewhat misguided on my part. I sought to comment on the lack of wisdom of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in choosing that newspaper as a source for his comments, but it was more a comment on the newspaper and on the user of the quotation than on the readers.

Mr. Griffiths: It was a fit of pique, anger and misjudgment by the Secretary of State to describe readers of the *Daily Mirror* as morons. I understand his desire to put the record straight. However, it seemed that, during the interview given to *Woman*, the Secretary of State was saying that, because of the difficulties faced by state schools, he did not know of any parents who wanted to send their children there, or that, at least, if they had the money they would desert wholesale to the private sector.

If the Secretary of State is prepared to listen, I can assure him that the majority of parents in my constituency —and, I am sure, that of almost every hon. Member—are committed to the state education system and want their children to go to schools that are not too far away and where they can be assured that teachers are well-paid, fully committed and happy and have high morale, so that they

can contribute to the education of their children, who in their turn will contribute to the economic and social well being of the country.

I mentioned the four comprehensive schools in my constituency such as Brynteg and Bryntirion in Bridgend and Cynffig comprehensive in Kenfig Hill and Porthcawl comprehensive in Porthcawl. Those comprehensive schools have a record of academic achievement and extra-curricular activities such as concerts and musical shows. I am sure that, if the Secretary of State were able to visit a state school, he would be welcome and would applaud those schools for their standards, for the commitment of the parents and for the fact that they are happy for their children to go there. Not all parents are satisfied, because clearly, all parents want schools to do better for their children, but, nevertheless, the majority are committed to and support schools such as those in my constituency.

One of the problems with the Bill is that of resources and the directions that the Secretary of State might want to apply to the independent review body. It was not clear either from what the Secretary of State said or from some of the exchanges whether the review body for teachers would operate in exactly the same way as those for dentists or doctors. If he were to make it clear that the ground rules would be exactly the same, the misgivings of some teachers' unions could be overcome.

It is a pity that, before introducing the Bill, the Secretary of State did not consult teachers' organisations and the local authorities, which are the employers. If he had done so, it might have been possible to come up with a pay review body which, in principle, had the assent of all parties involved. As the Secretary of State knows, the Labour party is, in principle, in favour of independent review bodies. It has advocated them in the past, and I am sure that if, on this occasion, wide consultation had been carried out, everyone would have been happy to support the Bill. It is the lack of clarity about the Secretary of State's intentions that gives us cause for concern.

The Secretary of State should also bear it in mind on the question of resources that local authorities all too often fail in their task of providing education, either because they do not receive sufficient funding from the Government or because they deliberately choose to use the funding for purposes other than those intended by the Government.

I use the example of nursery education. The 20 leading authorities in the provision of nursery education are Labour-controlled and the 20 worst are largely led by Conservatives. Let us take the specific example of the county of Gwent, where there will shortly be a by-election. That county provides 60 per cent. of its three and four-year-olds with nursery opportunities. In the neighbouring county of Hereford and Worcester, the figure is about 20 per cent., and in Gloucestershire, it is about 30 per cent. What a contrast between a Labour authority and two Conservative authorities.

It is on the question of nursery education that the famous Carlton club report accuses the Government of supplying inaccurate information in Conservative party literature and of not respecting its great importance.

When the Government deal with the pay review body, I hope that they will be prepared to consider the questions which have been raised about the Secretary of State's powers and, even, at this stage, to call in all the unions and the local education authorities to see if there can be general agreement and some changes to the Bill.

8.36 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): I followed the remarks of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) with interest but I am still not clear whether he supports the independent pay review body outlined in the Bill.

The most revealing speech from the Opposition was perhaps that made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery). He was in no doubt that he opposed the concept of such a body. He said—I took a careful note—that he really did oppose the Bill. He paused for thought and then said that he hoped that his party did too; the Bill needed opposing. His touching and rather plaintive expression of hope that the Labour party would oppose the Bill clearly showed that he—like the majority of my right hon. and hon. Friends—had been left in the dark by the contortions, the uncertainties and the evasions of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"]

I am not responsible for where he is now. He is no doubt soothing himself after the ordeal that he experienced this afternoon. For the record, it was 25 minutes—I was watching the clock carefully—before he even attempted to deal with the Bill. We had 25 minutes of irrelevant preamble, followed by 15 tentative and uncertain minutes during which he gingerly circled the Bill, never coming properly to terms with it. His embarrassment was plain to see.

Dr. Hampson: It was even worse. It became evident that, because he thought that the Association of University Teachers was in favour of a professional review body, he endorsed it,but because the National Union of Teachers was against one for schoolteachers, he was against it.

Mr. Irvine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has identified with precision one of the appalling contortions in which the hon. Member for Blackburn found himself. I want now to move on from that to the reasons for the difficulties that lay behind his speech.

The embarrassment of the hon. Member for Blackburn almost certainly stemmed from the fact that within hours of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State making his announcement on 17 April, five out of six of the main teaching unions had come out in support of the review body; the exception was the National Union of Teachers. That put the hon. Gentleman fairly and squarely on the spot. Despite the fact that the other teaching unions favoured the concept of an independent pay review body and despite the fact that a majority of members of the National Union of Teachers probably favoured the idea, a powerful element in the NUT leadership is set on a return either to Burnham or to something closely related to it. The hon. Member for Blackburn dares not affront that powerful element—hence his evasions, contortions and uncertainties.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my hon. Friend aware that in one excellently run primary school in my constituency, 100 per cent. of teachers were in the NUT? When there was last a strike, all except two came out of the NUT. Teachers do not want the right to strike,

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

that the hon. Member for Hillsborough apparently wants. They want the right to have a professional body to decide their fate.

Mr. Irvine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing my point.

We have had enough of the difficulties, uncertainties and miseries of the hon. Member for Blackburn. I will get on to a more positive aspect of the Bill. The status of their profession is naturally of particular concern to the vast majority of teachers. They recognise the damage that was done to the good name of their profession by the breakdown of Burnham and by the industrial disruption undertaken by a minority of teachers in the mid-1980s. The vast majority of teachers are rightly determined to re-establish their status and to emphasise their professionalism. The Bill is a significant step towards them doing so.

It is true that an independent pay review body is one thing and that obtaining from the Government the full implementation of that body's recommendations is another. However, teachers who are cynical or distrustful should remember that the recommendations of their independent pay review body will inevitably carry a great deal of clout and that that clout will be exercised in a highly sensitive and political area on which both main parties have laid great store. It will not be easy for a Government, whatever their political hue, to ride roughshod over the independent pay review body's recommendations.

I hope that, in determining the appropriate pay levels for teachers, the new pay review body will recognise the importance not merely of recruiting and retaining sufficient teachers, but of recruiting and retaining teachers of quality. The problem is not just making the numbers fit, but raising the quality level. That point was made effectively by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) when the House debated the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill in November. I was not present in the Chamber to hear the speech, but I read it in *Hansard* and I thought that it was excellent.

The need for teachers of quality is especially great nowadays. In a more competitive world, the benefits and skills that children can gain from good teaching are even more at a premium and the task facing teachers is in many ways more daunting than it used to be. There are more behaviour problems with which to deal, and there are far more children from broken homes and unsettled backgrounds. There is generally less respect for authority. All too often, there is not enough interest from parents, and there is a reduced level of attentiveness and application from children who are brought up to expect instant and effortless entertainment from television, videos and the like.

All that puts unprecedented pressure on teachers and makes it that much more important for teachers of quality to be recruited and retained. I very much agreed with what my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) said about the importance of ensuring that the pay of the experienced classroom teacher is given special attention.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) referred to local management of schools as a burden. In my constituency, local management of schools, far from being a burden, is improving morale among teachers. I know many teachers who had reservations about local management of schools and who now strongly support it. I also know some teachers who opposed it outright and who have now swung round to being in favour of it.

Great credit is due to the Suffolk education authority for the local management of schools formula that it devised and for the effort it put into training and preparing teachers for it. That effort has paid rich dividends. Local management of schools is working well in Suffolk. It has definitely played its part in boosting morale among teachers and school governors.

After going through an intensely difficult period, the teaching profession is now on the way to recovering its morale and self-confidence. This excellent Bill, in giving teachers their own pay review body and emphasising their professional status, will powerfully reinforce the welcome and continuing improvement in the status of the profession.

8.46 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): A succession of Conservative Members have repeated that they are unclear about the Labour party's position. Perhaps they have not read the Order Paper, where we set out with perfect clarity the grounds on which we oppose the Second Reading of the Bill. The reasoned amendment refers to the "unacceptable powers" that the Bill gives the Secretary of State and to the lack of any proposals

"to raise teachers' professionalism by the establishment of a General Teachers Council."

Alternatively, Conservative Members may have developed a blind spot. After 12 years, Conservative Members reject any deviation from counter-productive diktat. In 12 years in government, Conservative Members have lost the habit of listening, not least to what my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) says. They have turned a blind eye to the effects of their actions over those 12 years. That is what our debate is about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn was entirely correct in listing the series of assaults that successive Conservative Administrations have inflicted on the material and spiritual well-being of the teaching profession. There has been a steady decline in teachers' pay, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn referred, and teachers have been affected by so-called "innovation fatigue". There has been too much innovation, introduced too quickly and always "within current resources". That is the usual incantation. There have been constant challenges to teachers' professionalism and the cumulative effects of drowning in a sea of paper.

A university report, to be published later this year shows that secondary teachers spend an average of 63 hours a week on school work—most of it outside the classroom. They spend only one third of their time on teaching, and have less than 20 minutes a day for breaks and lunch. Teachers' conscientiousness, rather than their salary, status or prescribed working hours, is the critical factor in the excessive and unhealthy amount of time that they devote to their work.

Teachers do all that in slum conditions. My own local authority, Knowsley, can afford only £2·5 million for repair and maintenance work on its schools, although, according to a professional assessment, £8·5 million is needed to bring the school buildings up to scratch. That figure can be multiplied across all the local authorities in the land. That is in stark contrast to the bankrolling of the

city technology colleges and the grant-maintained schools, which are the darlings of the Government. It is all stick and no carrot. What a way to handle an intelligent and spohisticated profession.

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Gentleman referred to the grant-maintained schools as the darlings of the Government. Will he confirm that they are also the darlings of parents, and that the number of pupils applying for entry to them has increased substantially in the past two or three years?

Mr. O'Hara: The statistical evidence shows that there has been a pathetic response to the invitation to opt out. We have the evidence of a school in my own local authority area. When opting out was suggested, there was a 94·7 per cent. vote against, on a turnout of 75 per cent. That represents a pretty conclusive rejection of the notion.

Conservative Member's insensitivity was impressively demonstrated by their supercilious dismissal of the question why they do not patronise the state education system—except, that is, in their demeanour towards it.

During the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) made a revealing intervention, in which he defended the abandonment of the state sector by Ministers and Conservative Members on the grounds of the egalitarianism for which that sector stands. I hope that the Prime Minister, who advocates the classless society, was not listening at that point.

"Egalitarianism" is an interesting word. It refers both to equality of opportunity and to equity of provision—to "la carrière ouverte aux talents" and to positive discrimination in favour of those in greatest need. If that is not what a classless society means, I do not know what is. On both counts—opportunity and equity—egalitarianism will not do for Conservative Members. They do not want opportunity—except for their own children—and they do not like to allocate resources to the majority who patronise state schools.

That mean thread of dogma runs through so much that the Government have done since 1979. In the early days, the assisted places scheme provided a "ladder out of the state system"—as eloquent an admission as one could get that the state system was second class, was not good enough, was something from which to escape.

The dynamic of the city technology colleges was that success for the minority could be provided only at the expense of the majority. Entry to CTCs must be selective, and they are obscenely stuffed with funding. Grant-maintained schools provide a similar example of bribery and bankrolling. Only this week, grant-maintained schools have been given the mechanism to become selective, if they wish, as soon as possible.

What about the national curriculum? As hon. Members have said, it was on its way. It was an open door, but by running a bulldozer against that open door, the Government did untold damage. They almost ruined a good idea by their insensitive imposition of the national curriculum—although not in the private schools to which so many Conservative Members send their children.

All that was done, and for what?

"The Government will be judged in part on its perceived achievements and shortcomings in this crucial area"—

education, that is.

"It must be recognised that there is mounting concern that Conservative reforms have yet to produce results"—

after 12 years. Hon. Members will recognise my quotation, which comes from the Carlton club political committee report. There is some good stuff in that report. Apparently, we are bottom of the league table of nursery provision, our school governors have excessive powers and we have failed to curb the Church school sector. It is just as well that there are not many votes left for the Conservative party to lose in Knowsley, South, because —who knows—people there may read the meanderings of the Carlton club political committee in bed.

Is it any wonder that the teaching profession feels demoralised or that the Government feel that they must make some concession to those who must be the prime agents in retrieving this desparate situation? Is it any wonder that, after 12 years of iron rations, the demoralised teaching profession is prepared to accept half a cake—albeit with caution, as suggested in the quotation from the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) referred, in which that body expressed its regret at the haste with which the Bill has been introduced.

Even this much is offered grudgingly. The Secretary of State reserves intolerable powers of direction in this toothless tiger of a Bill. For the benefit of Conservative Members, I should say, "Watch my lips." This is the point of our opposition to the Bill. If the Bill is not toothless, it will be because it has a set of dentures designed by the Secretary of State. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman will assure us that he will not hand-pick the members of the body, and that he will ensure full and fair representation of all the interests affected by the review body.

Why does not the Secretary of State go further and consider allowing the teaching profession its own professional body, as befits its professional importance? Who was it who said:

"increasing the status of the teaching profession through the endorsement of a Royal College of Teaching is a concept strongly favoured by all advisers"?

It was the Carlton club group again. Short of a royal college, which the Labour party would prefer, I support the granting to the teaching profession of a review body. I cannot, however, support the Bill, because of the unacceptable powers of direction that it gives to the Secretary of State. According to the explanatory and financial memorandum, the Bill

"empowers the Secretary of State, where, following a report from the review body and having consulted associations of local education authorities and others, he decides to make fresh provision as regards the statutory conditions of employment of school teachers, to do so by an order, subject in specified circumstances to the negative resolution procedure".

That is the nub of the matter.

I referred earlier to a fundamental difference of ideology between the Labour and Conservative parties in their attitudes towards egalitarianism. There is another fundamental difference. I refer to my party's concern for good industrial relations, for the exercise of professional responsibility—for good psychology, perhaps. In the context of this Bill, it is appropriate to consider what teachers might think. Any decent teacher will tell one of the importance of giving his pupils a sense of being valued and involved in the enterprise of learning. So it is with colleagues in a common enterprise. What enterprise could

[Mr. O'Hara]

be more important for the Government, for the country and for those who devote their lives and careers to it than the education of the nation's children?

Before Conservative Members leap up to present a picture of a Labour Government and the teaching profession linked arm in arm, like the Kop choir singing "You'll Never Walk Alone", I hasten to say that that would be a travesty of the truth. We in Liverpool have two football teams. The other is Everton, whose motto is "Nil Satis Nisi Optimum"—"Nothing will do but the best". For the next Labour Government, only the best will do for education. The best cannot be achieved without the full co-operation of a teaching force with a sense of professional respect and responsibility. The Bill is irredeemably flawed in its capacity to provide that essential ingredient for success in our education system throughout the 1990s.

9 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I could make many comments on the speech of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), but I want to be brief. The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill is flawed. In fact, the flawed point in the Opposition's case is the one to which he referred. The Opposition say that they would not mind having a review body but that the one proposed is inappropriate because of the built-in responsibility of the Secretary of State. In the Standing Committee that considered the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said:

"We accept in principle that the Secretary of State should have the power to propose the final settlement in any pay award."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 24 January 1991; c. 208.]

That situation cannot be avoided.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I regret that the hon. Gentleman has not read the report of the Standing Committee that considered the Education Reform Bill of 1988. If he had done so, he would realise how flawed is his argument against the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). Throughout the proceedings of the Standing Committee to which I have just referred, Ministers denied what was really the intention behind the legislation. Our point is that the Government should be honest and straightforward. That is what the hon. Gentleman does not like.

Dr. Hampson: The hon. Lady will have an opportunity to reply for the Opposition. Let me draw her attention to the *Official Report* of 17 April, in which she will find these words of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State:

"As the Government face the fare and pay the bill, the Government have to have that power in the last resort."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 442.]

I thought that we had made that obvious throughout the proceedings.

What we have seen tonight is the total embarrassment —I hesitate to use the word "hypocrisy"—of Labour Members, who know that the course on which the Government are embarked is correct. The Government have changed course, and some of us are delighted about that. Surely Labour Members ought to be equally delighted. Why are they not? They think that the AUT is in favour of a professional pay body. I am not sure that it is.

We all know Labour Members' connections with the NUT. The Labour party and the National Union of Teachers have been hand in glove for decades. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) is paid by the NUT. She will be slightly embarrassed—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady allows me to continue, she will realise that it is not necessary to interrupt. I am not attacking her; I am merely pointing out that no doubt she is in a dilemma because she is the paid representative of the NUT and has a declared interest in the Royal College of Nursing. It seems to me that she has split loyalties.

Opposition Members have declared themselves as being in favour of the principle of the Bill but have scrabbled around for a way to oppose the precise nature of the Government's proposition. It is a case of wishy-washy dithering. I have been a member of the Carlton club for well over 20 years. By citing the Carlton club as the equivalent of a Government manifesto or a statement of Government policy, Opposition Members are scraping the bottom of the barrel. I was not even a member of the Carlton club group that has been referred to. Immodest as I am, I should not put much store by a situation in which I had not even been asked whether I should like to turn up. I have not even seen the document.

There are hardly any Opposition Members present at the moment, but I should like some of those who referred to the famous Carlton club paper to swear that they have read it. We all know what happens. These days, Labour spokesmen are supplied with a research brief. They have all been referred to the best bits of the Carlton club paper to quote.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Hampson: I shall not give way. I can see that the hon. Gentleman has a copy of the paper.

Mr. Griffiths: And I have read it.

Dr. Hampson: I cannot believe that all those who have spoken from the Opposition Benches this evening had a copy, because——

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Hampson: I told the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) that I would not give way. If my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) wishes to speak, I shall bring my remarks to an end in about five minutes.

I endorse the part of the paper that states that we must reward the better teacher. Most of us accept that teaching is fundamental to the entire learning process, but who resists that? The answer is the National Union of Teachers. It has never wanted pay differentials, and accordingly the Labour party has resisted the idea, as always. Labour-controlled councils such as Leeds have not accepted the technical and vocational education initiative. That is an example of another major reform on which the Labour party has turned its back.

The Labour party considered the national curriculum. A former Labour Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan of Cardiff, thought that it was essential if standards of education were to be raised. None the less, the Labour party turned its back on the concept. Every major

education reform has been instinctively rejected by the Labour party because of its relationship with the teaching unions.

The Labour party is grudgingly accepting the national curriculum nowadays, but it talks about upheaval and turbulence in schools. I say to the teachers that there would be a damned sight less turbulence in schools if we had acted earlier during the Labour Administration and dealt with the examination system, a national curriculum and all the other education reforms with which the Government are having to deal.

There is no point in Opposition Members saying that we are faced with the inheritance of the past decade. They know as well as I do that by the time we have educated sixth formers in mathematics and they have graduated, passed through teacher training and become teachers, and a framework for a national curriculum has been formulated, a lead time of about 15 years will have been spent.

The Opposition must bear responsibility for their dithering, their lack of decision making and the lack of funding for the education service when they were in government. They are responsible for what took place a decade or a decade and a half ago. The results with which we are faced are the results of their shortcomings. My right hon. and hon. Friends will be responsible for the standards of the education system in a decade or a decade and a half's time. I am sure that the standards will be much higher than those of today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) stressed the need for good school management. Leadership is important if a school is to work, and that reflects on the quality of the headmaster. I trust that we shall not turn headmasters into managers. We must consider imaginatively how part-time accountants and others can be introduced to schools to examine financial and management systems rather than to impose such systems on the headmaster.

I entirely endorse the arguments advanced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for introducing a pay review body. There is a case, however, for examining the pay of those who are engaged in higher education. We must have a body that embodies teachers that are involved in further and higher education so that we can have sensible relativities. Schoolteachers have done relatively well compared with teachers in higher education.

I know that it is easy to score points and we all might have wished teachers to have higher pay, but the salaries of schoolteachers have increased five times as quickly under Conservative Governments as under the Labour Government. I will not give the reasons for that, but that is what has happened. Although we might have preferred a further advance, salaries have risen by 30 per cent. in real terms while Labour could not raise them by more than 6 per cent.

We must also consider what has happened to people in higher education. When we consider morale in higher education and the talk of disruption, we should accord to them the professional status which in this Bill we are according to schoolteachers. The record of those in higher education in terms of the number of students passing through the system, the improved productivity and improved student-staff ratios are yardsticks that deserve recognition.

We have one of the tightest degree programmes of any western European higher education system and we are now arguing that degree courses should last two years. We have a very cost-effective higher education system, and its reputation hangs on the quality of the people teaching in it. They deserve the same status that we are seeking to accord to schoolteachers.

9.10 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The Secretary of State for Education and Science and several Conservative Members have mouthed phrases about having respect for teachers. However, it seems that that respect does not extend to reinstating teachers' negotiating rights. Nor does it extend to teachers at Culloden school in my constituency, who were witch-hunted by *The Mail on Sunday*. The Secretary of State joined that witch hunt by failing even to adhere to his Department's requirement that a report by Her Majesty's inspectorate should be sent to the governors, staff and the local education authority at least two weeks before it was made public. The report was leaked to *The Mail on Sunday* two days before and sent to the governors on the same day that it was sent to the rest of the press. Culloden school is in an area where 68 per cent. of the people are unemployed. Harassing its teachers was not a show of respect, and it certainly will not help to bring about improvements in the school.

Many teachers have supported the idea of a review body as a lesser evil. They thought that they would have to fight for increases in salary school by school. They did not realise that the review body would be loaded with extra powers for the Secretary of State to give directions on pay and conditions of employment.

Several Conservative Members said that good teachers should be rewarded. All teachers should be good teachers, or they should not be teaching. The Government believe that it is cheaper to reward a small group than to give a decent salary to the majority of teachers.

On Saturday, there was a knock on my door and a young lady came to collect my census form. She told me that I must put it in an envelope because she knew me; we used to teach together. She was using her evenings and weekends to collect census forms because she could not afford to pay her mortgage. That is a true reflection of teachers' conditions. That is why so many teachers are taking early retirement and why teachers who can find jobs in other areas are voting with their feet. That is why students will not enter teaching if they have a choice.

If the shortage of teachers worsens and the situation becomes chronic, craven researchers like Bennett will produce evidence to show that children learn better in large classes; but not of course in independent schools, just in schools for working-class—the majority—children.

The Secretary of State showed his ignorance about modern methods of education when he referred to teachers being judged by their performance in front of the class. He was casting his mind back to his own school days and the days of chalk and talk. Those days have long passed. Teachers no longer teach that way. In this modern world, it is not suitable for children who can see the whole world opening up before them on television to be taught by old-fashioned methods.

I might surprise the Secretary of State by telling him that, in my years as a teacher, I was rather conservative in my approach to teaching methods. I used to teach phonics. I annoyed many head teachers by putting an ABC on the wall, and teaching children the sounds and names of

[Ms. Mildred Gordon]

letters. I believe in teaching tables. The ready reckoners of the days when people learned tables were not so different from the pocket calculators of today. People still need their tables. I deplore the fact that children are no longer taught poetry by heart. I have spoken to many 80-year-olds who recited with joy verses that they had learnt when they were children.

I am not a faddist. Too many fashions have come and gone. Too many times I have seen the baby thrown out with the bath water. But the Secretary of State is a faddist. He wants to hark back to the phonic method only, and the graded reading system which parents regard as a ladder. They find out what book the child next door is on, and harass their child if she or he is not on the same book. That does not produce good results; it just produces nervous children. The Secretary of State wants a system akin to the monitor system for trained teachers. He really wants payment by results, too. He is harking back to a previous age.

The opposite is needed in this fast-changing world. We need to teach children flexibility. They need to learn to use reference books to find out how to do things. They are not open vessels into which we can pour information for them to regurgitate in tests.

The seven-plus test will do much more harm than good. Teachers will have less time to spend in teaching, and far more administration which is overburdening them already. Although a small percentage of children who would do well will get pleasure and advancement from it, the majority of children will lose their confidence. The main thing that a teacher teaches is self-confidence and improving the self-image. If children are happy and confident, one can teach them. If one introduces systems such as a public examination at seven, one will destroy the self-confidence of vast numbers of children, as the 11-plus did. I taught such children. It took years to restore their self-image and to enable them to learn properly again.

The other day I received a letter from a parent who said, "I do not want my child to take a public examination. The head teacher tells me that, if I send him to school, he has to take it, and if I keep him away I am breaking the law. Where is my choice?" That is a good question which I put to the Minister of State: where is the parental choice? None of those regulations applies to independent schools. The significance of that is not lost on parents. If it is good for state schools, why is it not good for independent schools?

I must conclude because, although I have sat here for six hours, I have only a few minutes to talk. The Secretary of State has been talking to the press about independent schools and about how everyone who can afford it would send their children to them. What they are paying for is small classes. That is what we want for all children. They also pay for social advancement—the contacts they make, the old school tie network—that puts so many nitwits into management that it has been destroying our industry. That is something else that they are paying for.

When I was training, the Butler Act had just come into effect. Many of the good provisions of that Act were never put into practice. I hope that many of the bad provisions of this Government's regulations, including this Bill, will not come into effect because we shall have a rapid change of Government.

9.18 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I guess that it is almost unique in parliamentary history to have two opportunities in the same parliamentary year to debate broadly the same issues, with slightly different Bills but very much the same themes. The first of those debates will be remembered for the fact that during it there was the leadership election for the Conservative party. I suspect that it offered a counter-attraction. When I read the *Official Report* of the Second Reading debate I realised that there were one or two moments when the Benches on the other side of the House were virtually empty.

I suspect that on this occasion, the debate will not be remembered for the election of the new leader of the Conservative party, because obviously that has not taken place today. It is much more likely to be remembered for the Secretary of State's gaff when he commented on a few million of his fellow citizens who read one daily newspaper. That most unfortunate comment leads us to question his ability to behave rationally in certain circumstances.

Let us now see whether we can come to some point of consensus or unanimity across the House. Virtually all hon. Members have wanted to sing the praises of teachers and to talk about their professionalism. Opposition Members welcome that consensus. We recognise that the teachers have enabled the changes in our education system to be made. Without teachers, there would be no delivery of the national curriculum, no seven-plus tests and no successful introduction of the GCSEs. Teachers have done much of that with an increased work load and often in difficult circumstances. It is right that the House should put on record its support for teachers and their professionalism and recognise the job that they have done in the past few years.

In his graphic speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) itemised the increased work load faced by teachers, their patience and their commitment to their pupils. That is something that we all recognise. Incidentally, we missed my hon. Friend's presence on the Standing Committee that considered the first Bill. Indeed, there are those who have spread the rumour that the only reason for the introduction of this No. 2 Bill is that it will give my hon. Friend the opportunity to speak in the Standing Committee that considers it. I am sure that he will take advantage of that opportunity on a number of occasions and speak with great enthusiasm.

Once again, my hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough brought to our debate his ability to understand the problems of the classroom, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) who made the good point that many teachers work in circumstances that are far from convenient or conducive to good quality education. She referred, for example, to crumbling schools. It is a scandal that about £4,000 million-worth of repairs and new build necessary are necessary to bring the quality of our schools up to standard. *[Interruption.]* I missed what the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) said, but I am probably fortunate in that respect.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I said that a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer put an embargo on school

building because he had to kow-tow to the International Monetary Fund. That led to a backlog in school building and school repairs.

Mr. Fatchett: I am rather sorry that I gave way to the hon. Lady, because, yet again, her point is incorrect. If she looks at the record and compares the statistics, she will see that Labour's record on school building was considerably better than that of this Government. I fear that the hon. Lady never recognises good facts, but always knows good prejudice and peddles it.

We have seen a number of prejudices in the debate. The hon. Members for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) and for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) talked about the quality of education being subverted by what they called "progressive teaching methods". That is now the theme of the Secretary of State. He has discovered what he too calls "progressive methods" and accuses those responsible for progressive methods of reducing the overall quality of education. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), I thought that it might be interesting to discover the basis on which the Secretary of State was making those assertions.

The hon. Members for Wolverhampton, North-East and for Norwich, North may well have more detailed experience, but the Secretary of State talks about the quality and direction of teacher education in a way that leads one to assume that he had some practical experience and had visited teacher training colleges throughout the country. We can all remember his comments about teacher training colleges. It was clear that if the right hon. and learned Gentleman had not paid such visits, other DES Ministers had done so. It seemed clear that the combined expertise of the DES at ministerial level resulted from a number of visits to teacher training colleges to find exactly what happens in them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East tabled a question, which was answered this afternoon, asking the Secretary of State to list the colleges of teacher education and training and the university and polytechnic departments of education that had been visited by all DES Ministers in the past six months. I stress that the question did not refer only to the Secretary of State. When I hold up the answer, the House can see that it is not a long list. It lists four Ministers and between them——

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Five.

Mr. Fatchett: I do them an injustice—there is a growing organisation. Between them, they have been to two colleges of education: the college of Ripon and St. John in York; and the Roehampton institute. Those two institutions have a lot to worry about, as they give grounds for many of the prejudices peddled from the Conservative side of the Chamber.

We have also heard about the argument for increased teacher professionalism. We would certainly support that. The hon. Member for Norwich, North argued that case strongly, as did the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). I welcomed her speech. It was almost a history lesson, because she kept talking about her party. I was not quite sure whether there was still a political party or whether she was talking about a social event in Greenwich at the weekend. Nevertheless, she was able to use the royal "we" with great skill on behalf of her two colleagues. I assume that there are still two.

I must confess that I went to Plymouth the other week to take a passing interest in the local election there. I noticed that the Social Democratic party there calls itself the Social Democrats of Plymouth so that it can retain the initials. It has maintained the initials, but I am not sure whether it has maintained the faith and the consensus.

Like virtually all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, the hon. Member for Greenwich said that she was in favour of professionalism for teachers, and I agree with her. In that context, it would be useful if the Government were prepared to support the notion of a general teaching council, which we have suggested on previous occasions. We think that that would be a good instrument to improve teacher professionalism, to give the profession a sense of purpose and to improve teachers' self-confidence. The Government have made a number of comments tonight about enhancing professionalism and I hope that they will accept the notion of introducing such a council.

Dr. Hampson: What will it do?

Mr. Fatchett: I am always happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman's sedentary interventions. We enjoyed one ealier this afternoon. The general teaching council would set standards of teacher education and in-service training; it would provide the professionalism that is known in other professions, such as medicine and law, which is a crucial and important task, and, it will give teachers the sense of self-confidence and purpose——

Dr. Hampson: What about discipline?

Mr. Fatchett: ——and the sense of discipline that is lacking.

Another aspect of professionalism mentioned by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East was the introduction of teacher appraisal, which she favoured. She wanted a national scheme for teacher appraisal. She must talk to the Secretary of State. There is no reason why she cannot do that.

Mr. David Davis (Boothferry): He might do a runner.

Mr. Fatchett: No, he will not, and he certainly will not do a runner to visit schools and colleges. The Secretary of State will be there and the hon. Lady should pick up the telephone, ring the Department of Education and Science, and have a word with him. Then she will find out that he gave only a quarter of the amount recommended by the independent body to the national appraisal scheme for teachers. If the Secretary of State had been serious about teacher professionalism he would have made the resources available so that the job could be done properly.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said that the House had reason to criticise Ministers

"for the appalling way in which the Government had treated the House".

He went on to use the word "deceit" about the Government's intentions and referred to the considerable delay between the date that the first Bill came out of Standing Committee to the date that the statement was made on 17 April.

We know that there is not a great deal of consistency between what was said on 27 November and what has been said this evening. It is interesting that, on the previous occasion, eight Conservative Back Benchers spoke. Each and every one of them spoke, with great enthusiasm, in favour of the first Bill, as did the Secretary of State.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: So did you.

Mr. Fatchett: The Secretary of State has already made one big gaff this evening; it is useful for him to keep quiet on occasion. I point out to him that we voted on a reasoned amendment in the previous debate.

Eight Conservative Back Benchers spoke in favour of the earlier Bill with great enthusiasm. It is interesting to note that not one has spoken in tonight's debate.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): They were gagged.

Mr. Fatchett: They were not gagged but embarrassed. Seven of them have not even been in the Chamber. The Secretary of State has no need to check. Unlike him, I do my homework, and I can tell him that there were eight speakers—seven of whom were not in the Chamber tonight—and each supported collective bargaining for teachers and opt-out for schools in individual local education authorities.

It is a distinguished list: the hon. Members for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), and the two whose contributions I enjoy the most, the hon. Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—the Nervo and Knox of education debates. The hon. Member for Dartford said in the previous debate that he had advocated the Bill during his five years as a Minister in the Department of Education and Science. He was so enthusiastic about the first Bill that he felt that all his previous arguments and persuasion of Ministers has at last worked. Sadly, he lost his job in the process.

The Secretary of State is now reading through the report of the proceedings of the debate.

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman is familiar with the debate, perhaps he will help me. I am looking for the reasoned amendment to see whether Labour Members gave their views on a review body. He has spoken for a quarter of an hour without mentioning those words, although they are the subject of the debate.

Mr. Fatchett: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman looks at the reasoned amendment, he will see what it says. It was not only the view of the Labour party, but that of the then Secretary of State. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) may be interested in this point. I asked the Secretary of State whether the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, felt that the teachers should have a pay review body. He will find this at column 749. The Secretary of State's response is clear enough. He said:

"However, I do not believe that we shall embark on a fresh review of pay arrangements, when the Bill"—

that is, the first Bill—

"contains excellent arrangements that should be enacted and put into force."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1990; Vol. 181, c. 749.]

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I am glad to see that I did not answer the question. The time has now come for him to answer the question. Is the Labour party in favour of a review body?

Mr. Fatchett: The Secretary of State's tactic when he is asked a question is to reply with a question. That is what he did earlier. No one can accuse the Secretary of State of consistency—*[Interruption.]* I shall deal with all the points; we have enough time.

In the first debate, we heard much right-wing ideology in favour of individual local education authorities opting out of central pay bargaining. That was seen as the answer to teacher shortages and the lack of motivation. Speaker after speaker on Second Reading and in Committee said that opt-out in individual local authorities was the answer to the problems of teacher shortages and pay. The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), who is not with us at the moment, was very enthusiastic about it in relation to clauses 8 and 9. He said that that was the key to greater flexibility and to greater incentive for individual teachers. Those were the arguments that the hon. Gentleman voted for on the previous occasion. We were told that they were important.

Let me say, as I like consensus to be maintained, that I am delighted that the arguments that my hon. Friends and I used in Committee against clauses 8 and 9 and opting out have been listened to and that the Government have dropped that right-wing nonsense from the Bill. I hope that we never again hear of the idea of individual local education authorities being able to opt out of the national pay structure for teachers. That ideology has been buried.

As for this Bill, and our reasoned amendments, our point is that the Bill gives to the Secretary of State extensive powers of direction and detail. He argued on previous occasions that the teachers' organisations favour a pay review body, but he was less than fair to them. He knows that the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association has said that, while it may favour the principle of a pay review body, it is less than happy with the powers that are being given to the Secretary of State. We were told by the Secretary of State that he would not interfere, that powers of direction had to be included in the Bill but that they are not important.

The Secretary of State then relied on an argument that I believe is the thinnest argument of all: that the powers have to be there because this is a statutory body but that they will not be used in any malicious or evil way "because you can trust me and I am a decent bloke." I have heard some weak arguments in the Chamber but that is one of the weakest I have ever heard. We may accept that this Secretary of State is a decent bloke, but we should like those powers to be substantially reduced.

What did the Secretary of State have to offer teachers? He offered them no additional money or resources but promised that the pay review body—I noted his words—could take account of the standard spending assessments for the level of investment in education. If account had been taken of the SSAs in 1989 and 1990, they would have led to a cut of £1·5 billion in education expenditure. That is what would have happened if individual local authorities had operated the Government's imposed, centralised target. Are teachers being offered a cut in resources? Teachers will not find such a offer attractive. Although Conservative Members may believe that the notion of a pay review body is acceptable, they ought to recognise that a pay review body will not be acceptable if it is used, as has happened during the last few years with the interim advisory committee, to reduce the real value of teachers' pay.

There is broad agreement that we need a well-paid and well-motivated professional teacher force. It is also clear that the country needs a Government who believe in and

care for state education and who will deliver success in our education system. That is why we need a Labour Government. That is why the people of this country want a Labour Government. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for our amendment.

9.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): Well, Mr. Speaker, after an hour and 15 minutes of contributions from Opposition Front Bench spokesmen, we still do not know where the Opposition stand. Will they, won't they? The answer is neither: they simply do not know.

Apart from that, we have had a good debate. There have been some excellent contributions. In particular, I welcome my hon. Friend's contributions and almost all those of Opposition Members who drew attention to the important role and the achievements of teachers.

They drew attention to teachers' commitment to improving standards and their solid professionalism in coping with change and implementing the far-reaching educational reforms that have been a feature of the past few years.

The House listened with particular attention to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). He knows better than most the difficulties that have faced Ministers in introducing the Bill. I was particularly grateful to him for his support as I am sure was my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) welcomed the Bill with great passion and commitment. He made it clear that he had wanted such a measure for a number of years. The whole House responded to the way in which he put his case.

Second Reading debates exist so that we can debate general principles, the broad thrust of policies and the nature of the proposed legislation. Conservative Members have explained clearly the essential features of the Bill. We have shown how a review body will recognise and strengthen the professional status of teachers. We have pointed to the extensive support for our proposals among teachers' unions and associations, and among teachers at large. We have made it clear that the award of review body status is a milestone in the development of the modern teaching profession.

Conservative Members have played their part in full measure. We have heard today telling examples of what can be achieved through good management and the effective use of resources. We have heard about the commitment of so many teachers to raising standards, and about the genuine desire that teachers show to meet the needs and aspirations of parents and pupils.

The picture of the teaching profession painted by most hon. Members during the debate chimes with my own experience. During my visits to schools, I meet dedicated teachers and enthusiastic pupils. I find it hard to discern the poor standards which others appear to see so readily. However, there are problems. Too many children have lower levels of attainment than they should have. Too many finish their education at 16 and the teaching force in some areas is not as strong as we need it to be. Resources are not always targeted effectively to raise standards and to respond to parents' concern.

Opposition Members insist on talking about the problems in schools. They stress the difficulties and failures and accentuate the negative. They do our teachers and children a grave disservice by ignoring or underplaying teachers' achievements and successes.

It is perhaps not surprising that many teachers believe that their achievements do not gain them the recognition they deserve. The Bill is an essential step in the process of restoring teachers' self-respect. My right hon. Friend and I share wholeheartedly the concern of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to raise the standing of teachers in society. The establishment of the review body is a tangible expression of that commitment.

Mr. Straw: As the Prime Minister is now here, will the Minister take his advice on a question that the Secretary of State felt unable to answer, on the grounds that he was not involved in the discussions? *The Times Educational Supplement* reported that the Treasury, with the present Prime Minister as Chancellor, had opposed a pay review body. Was that correct? I am happy to continue talking while the Minister takes the advice of his right hon. Friend.

Mr. Eggar: I do not need to take advice from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. We are looking forward. We are introducing a pay review body. That decision would not have been possible without the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. We expected to hear whether the Opposition support a pay review body. We have had 75 minutes of waffle but no answer to that fundamental question.

We have heard much about teachers' rights. Anyone listening to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) would think that that amounted to teachers' rights to take industrial action and to send children home. Conservative Members know that the rights teachers hold dear are the rights to respect, to professional status, to fair treatment and to fair pay.

There is a further right that the hon. Member for Blackburn has denied teachers—the right to know the policy of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition. We know the position on the pay review body of all my hon. Friends and all Opposition Members, with the exception of the hon. Members for Blackburn and for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). Everyone else has made their position absolutely clear.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: At what stage did Ministers decide to review the policy in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill?

Mr. Eggar: Ministers must consider policy in the light of developments. As the Bill progressed, we carefully monitored the attitude of teacher unions and associations and held discussions on the best way forward. We eventually reached the conclusion, with the full support of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that the best way forward for the teaching profession and our children was the introduction of a pay review body.

Dr. Hampson: The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) dithered on whether he could bring himself to oppose a professional review body because the NUT is against it, but the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) did seem to endorse the view expressed by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) —that the Labour party believes in teachers' right to strike. A pay review body will enhance the teaching profession and avoid classroom disruption.

Mr. Eggar: Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have extolled the virtue of teachers' right to strike, but have forgotten the right of children to learn.

I urge Opposition Members to take immediate steps to make it clear to the teaching profession whether they support a pay review body. The issues are not complicated, and the alternatives are not wide-ranging. The hon. Member for Blackburn does not need a plethora of facts and figures. As a special concession, we shall not ask him to cost his proposed alternative to a pay review body, but will he please let us know what the Opposition's position is?

There has been a torrent of words from the Opposition, but they have said nothing. They should stop dithering and trying the patience of the House, and should make their position clear. They owe that to teachers and to the country. I am willing to give way to the hon. Member for Blackburn. His silence speaks volumes.

Is the answer of the Opposition to the clear and simple question, "What pay machinery do you want?" a simple "Don't know; we shall have to consult the NUT"? The Opposition may not know what they think, but teachers do and will draw their own conclusions from their silence.

At one point in the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn, I thought that we might be getting an answer. He said, yes, he wanted a pay review body for teachers, but, no, he would not support our Bill, which introduces a pay review body: yes, he wants a pay review, but, no, he will not accept our pay review body. That is not a clear policy for the Opposition.

Then the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) entered the fray. In an intervention, he asked the hon. Member for Blackburn whether he believed that a small minority of teachers—presumably members of the NUT—would force the Labour party not to introduce a pay review body. The hon. Member for Blackburn said, "No, we will not be dictated to by a small minority of teachers," but he did not make it clear exactly why and in what circumstances he would have a pay review body. He said that the Labour party needed agreement, but he did not make it clear whether that agreement would be of all teachers, including all or part of the NUT.

I had thought that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) would save his boss, the hon. Member for Blackburn, from the ignominy of not making the position clear, but he did not. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central spoke for 25 minutes before even mentioning a pay review body. Having done so, he simply talked about the virtues of the Labour party. The Labour party may have many virtues, but one of them is not the virtue of making its position about a pay review body clear.

To be fair to the hon. Member for Blackburn——

Mr. Straw: No.

Mr. Eggar: I understand why the hon. Member for Blackburn does not want me to be fair. He made a substantive point, which was picked up by the hon. Member for Truro, when he referred to clause 1(4), especially the power of the Secretary of State to give directions. Because of the way in which teachers are employed, they have statutory pay and conditions. From that point of view, they are unique among those groups that have the benefit of a pay review body.

Because of the nature of teachers' employment, we have introduced a Bill to cover them. The point of the Bill is to ensure that everyone knows that teachers will be placed in the same position as other groups that have the benefit of pay review bodies, such as dentists and doctors. It is michief-making to suggest that the considerations in clause 1(4) are there to do anything more than replicate the existing informal arrangements that govern the review bodies for dentists and doctors.

The important point about clause 1(4) is that, despite what the hon. Member for Leeds, Central said and the hon. Member for Blackburn implied, it does not give the Secretary of State the power to impose a financial constraint on the pay review body. In that sense, it is crucially different from the independent advisory committee, and it is as similar as we can make it to other pay review bodies.

The review body will be free to make up its mind on the basis of all the evidence put to it. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that we will implement its recommendations unless there are clear and compelling reasons to do otherwise.

Mr. Straw: On what conceivable authority does the hon. Gentleman justify his claim that the wide power in clause 1(4) for the Secretary of State to give the review body directions to which it must have regard will not include financial directions? There is no point in referring to the fact that the 1987 Act went further. As the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State know, if this provision were interpreted by the courts, they would look at the words in the Bill. The Bill gives unqualified powers to the Secretary of State to issue directions as to the considerations to which the review body is to have regard. In what way do those words exclude financial considerations?

Mr. Eggar: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would get the point by now. The review body has to have regard to whatever directions the Secretary of State gives, but it does not have to abide by them. That is the critical difference between the position under the IAC and the position under the review body. That is why the new structure is as identical as we can make it to the existing review bodies.

Mr. Straw: We are making a little progress. We have now established that, as well as the Secretary of State being able to set terms of reference under clause 1(1) and having the reserve power not to accept the recommendations, the directions could include financial directions. The only difference betweeen us and the Minister is that he is saying that the review body could ignore them. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is scrabbling around desperately to find an excuse for not answering the fundamental question, which is, "Do the Opposition support a pay review body?" My right hon. and learned Friend made the answer clear, and so have I. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have plenty of chances to explore the question further in Committee if he still wishes to do so. However, I suspect that, by the time we reach the Committee stage, the Opposition will have realised that they must be clear on the essential question that we are discussing. They cannot continue to obfuscate this issue, which is vital to teachers, to children and to their parents.

Mr. Walden: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the real world, the most likely outcome of a pay review body for teachers would be a significant rise for teachers? Does

not that put the Opposition spokesman on education in an even more ridiculous position because, in the real world, he is opposing—or failing to commend—my right hon. Friend on that move? Is it not true that the decision of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education to set up the new mechanism in the full knowledge that it will in all probability lead to a significant rise for teachers underlines the Government's bold, imaginative and constructive policy?

Mr. Eggar: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is extraordinary that the Opposition, who supported a review body for so many public sector bodies, should refuse to support one for teachers. Why? They know that their paymasters—the unions—are divided, and, especially, that the National Union of Teachers cannot make up its mind about the position it should take.

In fairness, the hon. Members for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) spoke eloquently on behalf of the minority of the NUT. They abide by their desire to have negotiating rights, and are absolutely determined to insist that teachers should be able to take industrial action at the drop of a hat. They are the authentic voice of the Labour party, and they were as uneasy as we were about the obfuscation by their Front Bench. For the sake of teachers and children, we want to know the answer to the basic question. We have still not heard the answer from the hon. Members for Blackburn and for Leeds, Central.

The Bill is a tribute to what the teaching profession has achieved since Burnham went down in chaos. It holds out the prospect of recognition and stability in the years ahead. It is good news for teachers, and it will be good news for children and for their parents. The people who count are the children. They must come first every time. We are concerned to ensure that teachers regain their professional status, that our children are never again threatened by industrial action and that our teachers and children are able to benefit from the introduction of the national curriculum and the other reforms that we have introduced over the past few years.

We have made it clear that we will accept and implement the recommendations of the review body unless there are clear and compelling reasons for doing otherwise. We know that the Opposition agree that, at the end of the day, the Government of the day must have the last word because they are the paymaster.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Eggar: The Bill is straightforward and its message is simple. That may be what the Opposition find so distressing. The hon. Member for Blackburn and his hon. Friends have nowhere to hide. I cannot imagine that teachers will neglect or reject the offer on the table. Teachers are too level-headed and responsible to let the opportunity of the Bill slip away.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 310.

Division No. 129] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare

Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Martyn Jones and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard

Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

SCHOOL TEACHERS PAY AND CONDITIONS (No. 2) BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (No. 2) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State under that Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

National Curriculum

10.15 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in Geography) (England) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 678), dated 13th March 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 25th March, be annulled.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following motion:

That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in History) (England) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 681), dated 13th March 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 25th March, be annulled.

I appeal to Front-Bench spokesmen and Back-Bench Members on both sides of the Chamber to be brief. Many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Straw: I think that the House knows that the Opposition accept the principle of the national curriculum. It is right that Parliament should have a role in laying down the framework of what is taught in schools and in better defining the entitlement of each child during its years of compulsory education. There were always dangers that without proper checks parliamentary and ministerial power could be abused or used for partisan ends, and for that reason a careful procedure for establishing a national curriculum and agreeing it was laid down in the Education Reform Act 1988.

The effective and fair operation of the procedures was always to depend, as so often in this country, upon convention and self-denial by politicians rather than by explicit rule. As history and politics are so intertwined, history was bound to pose the greatest test of those procedures. The original proposals of the history working party aroused great debate about the balance between facts and understanding, and the previous Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), now the Leader of the House, referred the matter back to the National Curriculum Council. The council took account of his views, and many others, and made revised proposals for which there was wide agreement both inside and outside the profession.

In setting out his views in July 1990, the previous Secretary of State explicitly endorsed the proposal for 20th century history to be taught to the present day. He argued only for a "better overview" of 20th-century history, including in particular the development of the European Community.

On 2 November 1990, the present Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), replaced the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South. Over Christmas, we understand, and without any debate or consultation, he took his blue pencil to the draft curriculum. He decided that history was to stop in the mid 1960s. His method of amendment was crude and the result was bizarre. The Berlin wall was deleted. It was replaced by the Berlin airlift. "Modern Britain" was replaced by "Victorian Britain", the "middle east" by "Germany", and separately by the "Ottoman empire" and the "Irish Republic" by the "Irish Free State and Eire". An attainment target about

[Mr. Straw]

"changing attitudes towards the European Community"
was replaced by one about
"attitudes of different countries to the League of Nations".

Early 1960s end-dates were then inserted. The consequence of these was that the Americans were about to win in Vietnam, apartheid was fully effective in South Africa, large parts of Africa were still colonies and the middle east stopped with the six-day war in 1967.

As is often the case with such vulgar exercises, some parts escaped notice, as if to mock the censors. So a supplementary unit continues, unamended, to require study from before 1500 to until the present day.

In making those decisions, the Secretary of State claimed that national curriculum history should not go beyond the early 1960s because of the difficulty of treating such matters with an "historical perspective". He said that everything post early-1960s was "current affairs". He failed to take accounst of the fact that two thirds of all general certificate of secondary education history syllabuses go beyond the early 1960s. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has been unable to produce before Parliament any evidence of a lack of historical perspective in such teaching. Indeed, on 12 February he told me that political bias was not the reason for his decision. In the absence of any evidence to justify his decision, the Secretary of State must recognise that he has gratuitously attacked the skill and professional integrity of history teachers.

The Secretary of State's claim that anything after the late 1960s is current affairs is patently absurd. None of the children studying the curriculum will have been born before 1980. Current affairs are about affairs that are current in the news. There is no room for it in the already overcrowded timetable of secondary schools. When he responds to this brief debate, the Secretary of State may claim that he is not prohibiting the teaching of post-1960 or post-1970 history. That is disingenuous, because the timetables are packed out with the requirements of the national curriculum. What adds to the vacuity of the Secretary of State's prohibition is that it will not apply to children in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland or to children in private schools which conveniently are exempt from the national curriculum.

The Secretary of State applied a similar crude approach to geography. Without notice to anyone, he decided to remove inquiry skills, the use of secondary sources and diagrams from statements of attainment because he said that, however desirable, they are not particular to geography. In saying that, he found himself in conflict with everyone who has knowledge of the subject and also with parts of his own Government. Last year's Department of the Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", envisaged an important role for geography making young people more aware of and able to participate in action about environmental methods.

Even the Secretary of State was surprised by the depth and extent of the criticism of his decisions about history and geography. That criticism came from unexpected quarters. For example, Lord Blake, a Conservative peer and an official biographer of the Conservative party——

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): And a decent historian.

Mr. Straw: Yes, and a decent historian. Lord Blake said:

"It is ridiculous to stop history in the 1960s. It could stop round about the 1980s. There, you are coming into an era of controversial politics with the Thatcher revolution and that should be discussed in current-affairs lessons."

He said that it was ridiculous to stop it in the 1960s or 1970s.

In the orders that we are discussing, the Secretary of State recognised his earlier error and impetuosity and tried to climb down. However, the result is quite unsatisfactory. The 30-year rule has been abandoned, but it is to be replaced by a 20-year rule. Date-capping will stand in all its arbitrary absurdity. As Robert Medley, the chairman of the Historical Association's school council, said:

"We don't think changing it from a 30-year rule to a 20-year rule has made any difference. The principle of the thing is still daft."

Many of the original silly changes, including swapping the European Community with the League of Nations and modern Britain for Victorian Britain, remain in the supplementary order. They are included in the programme of studies for the fourth key stage, levels 4 to10. They include the cut-off dates in the mid-1960s.

With regard to geography, the Secretary of State reintroduced the study of competition over land use and the conflicting demands on places of scenic attraction. However, he refused to accept a much more fundamental point—the need for an emphasis on an investigative approach to geography, which the Geographical Association has said is fundamental to what geography is about.

With the power over the curriculum which has been taken by Ministers and by the House go some very important responsibilities, not least to ensure that we do not treat the curriculum in a partisan way. So far as possible, changes should be made in a consensual way and we should not treat the curriculum as a party political football.

The Secretary of State's two predecessors, both Conservatives, were alive to their responsibilities and they acted carefully when seeking to make changes in draft orders. They also gave notice of any changes that they had in mind with reference to proposals for working parties. The present Secretary of State has acted differently. Apart from the merit, or lack of merit, in his proposals, there is the charge that he has failed to follow the spirit of the procedures. In particular, on 2 November he took no account whatsoever of the position of his predecessors, and he then made proposals, of which no notice had ever been made by his predecessors, on points to which they had never taken objection in the drafts of the working party and National Curriculum Council reports.

The Secretary of State's predecessors were alive to their responsibilities, but this Secretary of State has shown by his conduct that he is incapable of appreciating those responsibilities, let alone measuring up to them. Because of that, we tabled the prayers to annul the orders, and I support them.

10.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): We have just had a debate in which the Opposition refused to take any clear stand on an extremely important matter for the future. We now have the Opposition spokesman taking a totally bogus stand, trying to find partisan controversy where none should exist, on

the past, as it happens, and on geography. I entirely refute his suggestion that what has happened brings a hint of party politics into the national curriculum. When the National Curriculum Council put proposals to me, I put out a draft order, with the reactions of me, Her Majesty's inspectorate and my Department to that draft order. We consulted on it. In the light of that consultation, we produced final orders.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is not trying to damage the national curriculum, but he will do so if he tries to invent partisan disputes at the late stage of a process of putting into place the orders for two key parts of the curriculum—geography and history.

I trust that, by now, hon. Members support the principle of the national curriculum, and also support the fact that the national curriculum will include history and geography as two of the key subjects. We all know that history and geography in particular have been fading in importance and sometimes in the strength with which they have been taught in schools in recent years. Her Majesty's inspectors have found standards of work in primary schools generally weak in both subjects. In secondary schools, HMI has found that the so-called humanities approach adopted by some schools fails to do justice to either history or geography. The Government are reviving history and geography as serious subjects in our schools for our pupils. The Government may take credit for including them in the national curriculum and for making the orders.

The orders set out a solid foundation of knowledge, understanding and skills which all children should have in both subjects. We are reinstating those important parts of our knowledge, life, culture and history in our schools.

The process that I have described was always envisaged in orders that have been fully consulted on at every stage, of publishing draft orders with the Secretary of State's reactions to the final proposals from the National Curriculum Council, at which it arrived after consultation, and building on consultation that it has carried out from the final proposals of the working party. I then consulted on those and, in the end, made various changes when I first published the draft and again in the light of the final consultation.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: This is a prayer, and we have a little more than an hour left, and I made a long speech on the Bill. I might give way in a while, but I shall have to see how long I take.

Let me begin with geography. The geography order sets out to make sure that our young people learn some geography, not just vague concepts and attitudes which relate to various subjects. In geography, we have restored learning about places and where they are—something which nowadays is too often played down in some schools. The most elementary cross-examination of pupils reveals that their knowledge of where places are in the world is not what it should be. I, together with many parents, employers and others, believe that knowing about places —to use that simplistic phrase to describe an awareness of the geography of the world—is important.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way yet, for the reason that I have given.

Of course, that is not the be-all and end-all of geography. Angry teachers have told me that all I am doing is wanting to go back to teaching about the capes and bays of England. I would not dream of putting such a burden on a geography teacher. It is essential to have some knowledge of place if pupils are to go on to develop some understanding of the world and the way in which different countries and places relate to each other.

The order also ensures that all pupils will be taught how to use maps and other geographical skills. They will develop their knowledge of human and physical geography in the context of real places. Last but not least, the order recognises the importance of learning about the environment. There was a flurry of excitement when it was said that I had struck out environmental geography. In fact, it is one of the five attainment targets for geography. Indeed, together with physical geography, it is the part of the NCC's proposals that I have scarcely touched at all. I made no changes to either before going to the draft order phase. Overall, the order's coverage of places, of human and physical geography and of the environment has been widely welcomed by geographers.

It was against that background—against the fact that the great bulk of the subject has been modified in a way that has not excited any controversy—that some controversy arose about some of the changes. With respect, much of the criticism was based on a misunderstanding and a certain reading of lobbying letters and press reports rather more than on any reading of the orders themselves. I do not usually dismiss all criticisms, but I received many letters from people who had plainly not read the orders. They were the people who said that I had struck out all environmental geography, whereas it remains one fifth of the attainment targets, and quite untouched.

The Geographical Association has sent out a standard letter—I do not complain about that—to every Member of Parliament and many other people and to all the members of the association, complaining about the changes that have been made, but it does not actually state what those changes are. With the greatest respect, a lot of heat has been generated, but perhaps not a great deal of light about what the association was complaining about. The association's full submission was presented to me after we had introduced the draft order and before we made the final order, and I accepted many of its points. We have had a new lay-out for the programmes of study, which the association was right to say were previously laid out in a confused fashion. That was a major re-write. We put back conflicts over land use and, as the hon. Member for Blackburn fairly conceded, the points about landscape.

However, the hon. Gentleman did not address the two remaining issues about which people are still arguing. The first is the concern that I am said to have removed inquiry skills from being part of geography. I accept that inquiry is an important part of geographical work. Pupils should take an active role in their lessons and inquire about the nature of the issues that emerge in the course of their study of geography and of our fragile environment. The programmes of study for geography clearly state that inquiry should form part of geography lessons.

However, I did remove some of the detailed requirements in the programmes of study, stating exactly what pupils should do—and I do not apologise for that.

[Mr. Clarke]

The orders should not prescribe everything that happens in the classroom and take away all discretion from the teacher. In addition, some of the things that are allegedly related to inquiry skills in geography are so general as to be almost meaningless in the context of this part of the curriculum.

Two examples of my deletions are:

"Explore how people vary in their views about the value and enjoyment of environments."

There is no reference to where or to what kind of environment. The other example reads:

"Collect, present and interpret data as part of an inquiry."

That does not even specify "as part of a geographical inquiry". All that sort of stuff was taken out of an overloaded order largely to tidy it up—*[Interruption.]* It is not silly—at least I am referring to what I deleted. The hon. Member for Blackburn huffed and puffed but did not complain about anything that I had taken out. He gave no examples, yet I made countless changes when going through the order.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way once on geography when I have finished this point.

The fuss is meant to be about inquiry processes, and attitudes and values. Again, I accept that geography lessons will deal with issues on which there are conflicting points of view. It is the teacher's job to explain them to pupils in a balanced way. It is total nonsense for the hon. Member for Blackburn to keep saying that I have attacked the integrity of teachers. I have not done that in either geography or history from beginning to end. It is a proper and necessary part of geography, and the order provides for it.

I was not persuaded that pupils should be tested on their knowledge of what people thought about an issue, in isolation from knowledge and understanding of the relevant facts. It is taking the study of attitudes in geography too far if one tests people on their knowledge about other people's attitudes to somewhere, without knowing much about where that somewhere is, or what the attitudes are for.

The result is a tidier order, which is more manageable in the classroom. I have accepted far more of the representations received during consultation than I have rejected. I accept the assertion of the hon. Member for Blackburn that he has read the order, as opposed to many people who have only read the standard letter. However, in so far as the hon. Gentleman is specific about what was wrong in geography, given that last week his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales said that there was too much concentration on process in parts of the curriculum and not enough on content, I think that the order has a lot of content—far more than there has been in geography for many years. It is no good saying that there should be more process, and carrying on about inquiry skills, attitudes and opinions, put in to the exclusion of content or so that it is unmanageable.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: May I question the Secretary of State on the subject of collecting data? One of the key elements in geography teaching is that pupils should go out from the classroom to collect information and then bring it back and analyse it. It has been suggested that the Minister is taking out the collection of data because he is trying to discourage field work, which he knows is expensive. The Government have not been prepared to make the resources available so that all pupils can get some time out of their classroom to look at the environment.

Mr. Clarke: The use of maps and field work are in place in the order. We have cut out of the syllabus examining people on the collection of data that might have no relevance to geography. The hon. Gentleman will find that the order provides for plenty of going out of the classroom to collect things, and for the sort of experience that he describes.

History was bound to excite the most public debate. I am glad to say that most of that took place before my time as Secretary of State, although I would have happily joined in, as I am closely interested in the subject. History arouses strong feelings and passionate disagreements. Inevitably there are political undercurrents to the debate about history, which have been pretty thoroughly aired in the past year or two.

The result has been no fewer than three separate stages of consultation about history, instead of the usual two. My predecessor thoroughly explored opinion before he responded, even in the first place, to the history working group's report. Of course the outcome will not satisfy everyone. It is impossible to come to any conclusion in this field. However, I believe that we have reached a broad consensus on what school history should be like, which is reflected in the order.

By the time I arrived, the mass of political representation—both left and right made representations ferociously to my predecessors—had more or less died down. That meant that I was not able to inject any of my reactions to the content of the programme of study. I find it a bit odd that the renaissance and much of European history plays such a small part in the curriculum, but that is all water under the bridge, and I would not dream of reopening the debate.

There is an argument about whether there is enough factual knowledge in the programme. I still get that attack from those who are slightly on the right of politics, because the attainment targets in history are in general terms, and the substance of history is all in the programmes of study. It would be a great misfortune—a disaster—if knowledge of historical fact was ironed out of the whole subject and the attainment targets were attitude-dominated.

I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Blackburn agrees, because I am sure that there are people to the left of him in the Labour party who are shocked to discover that dead people, dates and things that happened in the past are being referred to at all. I can reassure those who believe, as I do, that one of the great things in history is to teach a good corpus of factual knowledge, that it is not possible to achieve any levels in the attainment targets without reference to programmes of study.

Although we may all have our personal preferences—I have expressed surprise that the renaissance features to such a limited extent; it is not a period on which I claim to be particularly strong, but it is surely a key period in the history of mankind—a good body of knowledge is none the less represented, and pupils will be tested on it according to the attainment targets.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it true that, some time after Commander Saunders-Watson had written his report, a memorandum

was issued by Professor Brian Griffiths rubbishing that report? If so, can a copy of the Griffiths memorandum be put in the Library?

Mr. Clarke: As that would have happened before my time, I do not know whether it is true or not. Representations about history, however, flowed in from all sides. Now, when the dust has settled down, we are left with one issue: the distinction that I have insisted on drawing between history and current affairs. The hon. Member for Blackburn is still going on about that.

No one is saying that there should be no reference to current affairs in the classroom. Plainly—particularly as children grow older—plenty of discussion about current affairs will take place. That is fine: it happened in my day, and it should still happen nowadays. I have never attacked the ability of good teachers to handle such discussion in a detached and objective way. I trust that a high proportion of children debated the recent events in the Gulf, and that opinions of all kinds were expressed; and I have no doubt that that was managed sensibly in the classroom. We are arguing about whether current affairs should be made a legally required part of the history syllabus.

If the order were allowed to include all events up to the present day in the curriculum, we should not merely be giving teachers discretion to allow current affairs to be raised. They already have that discretion, and we are not stopping them raising any subject. If the change were made, they would be required by law to cover today's events as part of the history curriculum, and would have to test pupils' understanding of current political issues as part of the history testing process. I find that slightly bizarre, but it is what the hon. Member for Blackburn wants.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will if I finish before 10.45 pm.

Another important principle is the definition of history. What is the nature of history? No one is banning current affairs; no one is saying that pupils cannot discuss what is happening today. There is, however, a strong argument, which I personally support, that history—in so far as it is worth while to define the subject; some people have written volumes in an attempt to do so—involves the making of judgments concerned with historical perspective. There is no doubt that a judgment made at even a short distance from the event or pattern of events and involving a backward-looking view will differ from an instant reaction to the morning's newspapers, whose contents would, if the Opposition's proposal were accepted, be described as "history" for the purposes of the national curriculum.

The original draft order included a date, which did not occur throughout but was a key part of the order. That was challenged. I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who came to tell me that he thought that one cut-off point was somewhat arbitrary and that, apart from anything else, repeated orders would be needed to bring the position up to date each year—unless history became ever more distant, falling away behind us, as a result of a parliamentary order.

My hon. Friend came up with the best suggestion that I heard throughout the consultation period. If we altered the wording of the order so that it referred to a cut-off of about 20 years ago—not a fixed date—historical perspective and the ability to form judgments on it would roll forward with time. I have no doubt that all the orders will be reviewed from time to time as the curriculum evolves and people form a view about what subject matter it should contain.

Mr. Radice: Surely that phrase "about 20 years ago" exposes the problem. Such people as Professor Keith Robbins and Lord Blake have pointed this out to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Let us take our entry into the Common Market, which happened, I believe, in January 1972—[HON. MEMBERS: "Nineteen seventy-three."] That makes my point even better. That event would be ruled out, by legal requirement. Therefore, one learns about the debates that took place in the House, but one does not learn about the date of entry. According to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's definition, that would be the case. That is precisely why Lord Blake and Professor Keith Robbins, who is president of the Historical Association, said that this is not a stupid argument. It is an argument made by serious historians—historians rather more serious than the right hon. and learned Gentleman—and he ought to take it seriously.

Mr. Clarke: They may be more serious historians than I, but, with respect, they have misunderstood the nature of the order. Their argument is founded on the mistaken belief that a ban is being placed on anything that happened more than 20 years ago. That is not the case. Any history teacher who wishes to take the history of our relationship with the European Community up to the date of our entry or beyond is perfectly free to do so. No one is banning it. As for the curriculum and the testing, the date is about 20 years ago.

The first draft, when I went for the early 1960s, sought to illustrate in various areas of history how one might take a suitable cut-off point—the death of President Kennedy or the death of Khruschev—near enough around 20 years ago in order to consider a particular sequence of events that represent the logical end of a course of study. I believe that that was justified. It would be absolutely absurd to alter it and make it a legal requirement that, as part of the history curriculum, pupils should be tested on their knowledge of bang up-to-date events and exchanges taking place across the Dispatch Box at the moment. Pupils are perfectly free to discuss all that with their teachers, but it certainly should be no part of the legally required history curriculum.

I discussed with those who advise me all sorts of other things that led to a great deal of re-writing of the history syllabus that no one seemed to have noticed. That again led me to have slight doubts as to whether anybody had read it properly. Some of the examples seemed to me slightly odd. I did not understand them, so we changed them.

Under the heading "The use of historical sources" the draft that reached me asked pupils to

> "Show how a US account of the building of the Berlin Wall provides evidence of US attitudes towards the event but reveals little about why the Wall was built."

That seemed to me to presuppose that all American authors have the same view and that there was a United States account. It was not obvious to me what United States attitudes to the wall that question would reveal. The various Americans I know hold a wide range of views about the Berlin wall. I do not see why any American

[Mr. Clarke]

account will reveal why the wall was built. A number of Americans have a pretty shrewd idea why the wall was built, so I did not understand the question.

"Explain why gaps in sources relating to collectivisation in the USSR in the 1930s make it difficult to reach definitive conclusions."

It is difficult to reach definitive conclusions on any historical subject that I have encountered. Most historians will probably say that it is unwise to do so. I could not understand what that was meant to mean. Does it mean that we do not know exactly how many people died? Does it mean that we do not know exactly what the collectivisation process is? What was it going into the national curriculum for, and as an example of what? We changed it and gave a whole lot of other examples for which the Government can modestly take credit, because so far no one has criticised any of them.

The hon. Member for Blackburn did not leave it to others; he says that he does not like any of the examples and that he thinks that they are partisan and biased. They are plainly not. It is a good, objective history course.

The order is an important step forward. It puts into the schools curriculum sensible history and geography that will be properly tested. These subjects are put back where they deserve to be—in the main stream of our education system. Some hon. Members may not have read what is contained in the folders that lie in front of them. Anybody who can get through the full compass of the geography curriculum and the full compass of the history curriculum and at the end get attainment level 10 may be no wiser, but he or she will certainly be better informed. It is a good, solid body of teaching that we are putting into our schools, and it is high time, too. These bogus arguments about the curriculum are rather silly.

10.49 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I shall not detain the House long as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. In what was a most disingenuous speech, the Secretary of State was really telling the House that the orders do nothing. We know that that is not the case, and so do the Historical Association and the teaching profession.

I would make the same speech if we were in government, trying to persuade the House to accept such a measure. I fear any Government telling teachers what they shall not teach. It is fair enough to have a national curriculum setting out what children should be taught, but it is wrong to say what should not be taught or to tell teachers how to teach their subjects. Whatever the Secretary of State may have said, that is how teachers will perceive the measure. They know that there is an embargo on teaching 20 years of history. History teachers, headmasters and particularly school governors are not educational lawyers. They will feel restrained in the teaching of their subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was absolutely right. Teaching geography in the way that he described turns youngsters into little explorers. In a small way, they are doing what an explorer does in Africa, and they should be examined in that. It is more dangerous when the Government seek to interfere in the teaching of history.

The Secretary of State mentioned the Gulf war. It would be perfectly reasonable for a teacher who was teaching mediaeval history and covering the history of the crusades and their effects on history to discuss the Gulf war. The Gulf war is now history. History starts now, just as the future starts now. It is a seamless robe and we cannot have a 20-year rule.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Oakes: I promised Mr. Speaker that I would be brief. I hope that the hon. Gentleman gets a chance to speak.

It would be perfectly feasible for a teacher to discuss western interference in the middle east and its effects on history. The purpose of teaching history is not to recount a list of facts but for children to learn about the past in relation to the present and apply that knowledge to future events. That is essential in a democracy. If teachers are teaching about the famine in Ireland, it is perfectly relevant for them to refer to that and to examine the Secretary of State's brilliant talks—he is doing a tremendous job—in the light of the historical perspective of the horrors in Ireland, which are still remembered 150 years later. It would be perfectly logical for an examination question to ask how our Secretary of State for Northern Ireland can succeed against that background.

Finally, I am addressing you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and all right hon. and hon. Members as 650 history teachers. We all take tourists around this place. We talk about Simon de Montfort and the row between the Lords and the Commons. We talk about the civil war and show them the painting with Mr. Speaker Lenthall. We then take them into the Chamber and out into Westminster Hall. When I take people round, I talk about the fight for democracy over hundreds of years—it did not happen overnight—and I tell them about events that have occurred in the past 20 years. I tell them about the IRA bomb in Westminster Hall and the damage that was caused. I take them outside and tell them about the murder of Airey Neave in 1979 when he was coming out of the car park. I do so because history is a seamless robe. I would tell those children that the fight for democracy is not over because there are still terrorist forces that would destroy it.

If I were a history teacher—I might be wrong and the Secretary of State might be right—I would be fearful of putting my job on the line by including such information in my teaching of historical events before the 20-year rule.

The Government should withdraw the orders, which are either useless or harmful in a democratic society.

10.55 pm

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I was not on the Standing Committee that considered the Education Reform Bill, but I was struck by how little attention was paid to the content of the national curriculum. There were battles on opting out, the Inner London education authority and so on, but remarkably little time was spent in considering the curriculum.

It was a pity that the question was not raised or seriously discussed of whether history should be not only one of the 10 subjects available in the national curriculum but one of the core subjects. I believe that it should have been a core subject. I tabled an amendment to that effect on Report, but it was not called.

History has almost unique qualities. It is the best tool for studying relationships in society. One gets a sense of a shared past and of shared or perhaps unshared divergences. A. L. Rowse said that history gives a unity to all the other arts subjects, and anthropology, sociology, economics, law and languages all draw on history. It helps to transmit the best in our culture from one generation to another, which should be the essence of education, and contains much great literature. It spans the factual and the romatic and teaches honest analysis. It is a pity that it does not play a larger part in the curriculum.

Everybody will agree that at the heart of history is the sense of perspective, to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State referred. It is derived from its focus on the past. We know that history has been defined over and again, but the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as

"that branch of knowledge which deals with past events, as recorded in writings or otherwise ascertained; the formal record of the past."

We must accept that. We all realise that history can be extrapolated. A good history teacher will draw lessons from history that are applicable today, but it is more important that children up to 16 get a grasp of the basic facts and methods of history rather than it being turned into a current affairs seminar.

In a sense, I might argue otherwise. One of the features of the past few years that will not be included in the main core is the demise of socialism. It might be good if everybody learned about that at school, but I am prepared to forgo that in the interests of achieving some principle in history.

The 20-year period, roughly speaking, coincides with my period as a Member of Parliament. The main events of the 1970s were our entry into the European Community, the saga of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974, followed by the miners' strike, our taking direct rule in Northern Ireland, the recourse of the Labour

[Sir Timothy Raison]

Government to the IMF in 1976, the battle about devolution, the events of the winter of 1978-79 and the arrival in 1979 of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) as Prime Minister.

Those were important and, in some cases, stirring events. They will become the absolute stuff of history, and there are two ingredients in almost every case. The first is that most of them still arouse intensely political passions—they would stir the House this evening if we were to start arguing about them—and the second is that, by and large, we do not yet have the historical writings to enable us to deal with them satisfactorily. History requires perspective. We do not yet have the literature to allow us to deal with those matters as thoroughly as we would like.

I quote my experience. A year or two ago, I sat down to write a history of Conservative social policy since the war. I have no doubt that the period in the post-war years when I was writing as an historian from a more distant past was very much better history than the past decade when, to some extent, I was involved in events. That is the essence of history: one must stand back.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is right to take the stance he took. As he said, it does not preclude mention of recent events. It could not possibly do so. Nevertheless, we should adopt the view that history belongs to the more distant past and is best taught on that basis. Any attempt to do otherwise would undermine many of the characteristics that make it such an important subject.

11 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): This is an interesting and worthwhile debate, and I regret that we do not have longer to give to this important subject. There is a paradox in Government policy in the home affairs sectors. Earlier today the Secretary of State for Health said that it was not his job to become involved in the details of administration of parts of the health service. Later in the day the Secretary of State for Education and Science gave his reasons for including something and excluding something else.

Our wish to incorporate a coherent view of what should be taught in history and geography comes not before time. As the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) said, they are important subjects. I regret that they are not given sufficient recognition as proper subjects that educated people in a range of disciplines later.

I am one of those—I suppose that many hon. Members share this disadvantage—whose teenage education in history and geography suffered from being extremely partial. Whole periods of history and sectors of geography went untaught. I accept that the national curriculum seems to deal with that partial teaching approach, but it stops too early and has made some mistakes.

However well informed or ill informed the Secretary of State for Education and Science thinks the people who wrote to us are, it is regrettable that the professional groupings of those responsible for teaching history and geography are not happy about what they will soon be asked to teach. It would have been far better if we had tried earlier to reach greater agreement among the parties and, more important, the politicians and professionals.

Problems remain. There will be partial teaching for those who finish their schooling in either history or geography at 14. I think that I am right in saying that the only piece of 20th century history that will have been taught to people who finish after the third key stage will be the history of the second world war. That is a grave error and distorts social and historical trends throughout the century.

Similar problems arise because of our lack of knowledge about the alternative short courses. The Secretary of State announced in Leeds that there would be short courses for those who stay on at school to complement compulsory education to 14 so that people do not leave school with third key stage education in history or geography. Sadly, we still do not know what those short courses will include. It might alleviate some fears if we did know. We do not have the details of those courses—they are concept rather than programme. What are the attainment targets? Will level 10 be reached by those following those courses, or will it be level 7 or 3? There are many questions relevant to how much people will know on leaving school. I regret that we do not yet have the necessary information.

My next point is a practical one. Teachers make one complaint above all to hon. Members, and that is the amount of work that they are asked to take on at a late stage. It is late in terms of next year's work for teachers now to begin to deal with the curriculum. I am not saying that they will not try or that they will not do a good job, but it is a regrettable additional imposition on people who even Ministers now concede are asked to deal with too much too quickly.

I shall deal briefly with the two subjects under discussion. I listened carefully to the right hon. Member for Aylesbury, but I dissent from the view that all the matters about which he spoke—especially entry into the European Community—cannot and should not properly be taught as history even at this remove. It is difficult and arbitrary to draw a line and say that events that happened within the past 20 years are not history. I heard what the Secretary of State said, and I understand that it is not because such matters will not arise in the context of the school day, the school debate and the school timetable. However, there are historical patterns such as the development of Europe, the rise and fall of philosophies including communism and socialism and the movement towards integration after the second world war. Arbitrary cut-off points are an unfortunate division between what is history and what is actuality. There are no stopping or starting points between the two.

Our history syllabus focuses too heavily—and I could cite specifics—on a Britain-centred perspective of the world, on Britain as an economic, successful, capitalist market economy. I am making not a partisan point but one about our place in the world. Our syllabus suffers from still not providing an opportunity for people to see Britain in its historical context as one of more than 150 sovereign states in a complex and ever-changing world.

The Secretary of State knows what the dispute over geography is about. It is about how much balance is given to the study of facts, places, locations and geographic skills. I agree that people should know their factual geography. As the Prince of Wales said in another context, it is most important that people leave school with basic

knowledge. However, to do that to the exclusion of some of the process skills—as appears to be the case—would tilt the balance in the wrong direction.

The orders will determine what young people learn in two key subjects for the next generation. We accept that we are not serving young people well in the education that is provided. We are not doing well in the international league table. I regret that the way that we have tampered so arbitrarily with the syllabus will not achieve the best result. For that reason, my colleagues and I support the Labour party in asking that the orders be annulled.

11.8 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): This is a pretty rum debate. Tonight we are deciding what millions of children will study for millions of hours in subjects that used to be left to the profession. How did that happen? It happened because all parties and the country as a whole felt that the professionals were not doing a good enough job of these and other subjects. Otherwise, how did the Labour and Liberal parties join a Conservative Government in setting up a national curriculum? Let us be frank and honest about it. We are discussing the details of a curriculum and I should have preferred this debate not to have occurred. There is no alternative but to do what we are doing, so we must do it as best we can. In the case of a sensitive subject such as history, that depends on objectivity.

Leaving aside my own partisan views, I much prefer the Johnsonian sound sense of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on the subject to the views of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) if only because a few hours before the hon. Gentleman refused to take a position on an education subject because he did not have the permission of the National Union of Teachers. I suspect that his judgment on matters involving the curriculum would be similarly influenced by the NUT, and I find that disturbing. I do not accept that I am making a political accusation: it is a factual observation.

It is also factual to say that the historical reasons why we have come tonight to the curious position of discussing the details of the curriculum go back to a philosophical failing in our education system for which the Opposition have more responsibility than we have. I do not deny that we too have responsibility historically for allowing the position to arise, but I believe that the main problem stems from methods of teaching which have gone wildly astray and which my right hon. and learned Friend is putting right tonight.

Other hon. Members have referred to the question of historical perspective. There is a danger in our teaching and in our culture—and, again, this is not a partisan point—of a relentlessly contemporary approach. In our schools in art, in literature and in history to some extent, there has been a drift, perhaps impelled by the power of the media, towards a relentlessly contemporary attitude to the exclusion of historical perspective or of simple, factual historical knowledge. In art, there may have been an exclusion of the awareness of renaissance techniques in favour of 20th century movements such as impressionism and expressionism. In literature, we have already reached the stage at which there are A-level syllabuses that can be tackled without any knowledge of pre-20th century literature. That is an odd state of affairs.

We have a similar problem with history. It is, of course, arbitrary to cut off the history of the past 20 years. My right hon. and learned Friend has explained that it will be possible to teach it in other ways, so there is no ban. However, I believe that there must be a cut-off point if only because Opposition and Conservative Members have reflected teachers' concerns that the national curriculum is becoming too crowded. However, the hon. Member for Blackburn says that we should try to cram even more into the history curriculum. That time would be better used in instilling in our pupils the maximum historical knowledge so that their ability to make judgments of recent events will improve.

In what society do children live today? It is not the society in which we were brought up. It is a society in which contemporary history oozes at children from every pore of the media. It oozes from television, which children watch for an average of three or four hours a day, from the radio and from the newspapers. Whichever way they turn, contemporary events are pumped at them. For one short time in their childhood they can be removed from these incredible pressures—leaving aside moral pressures, which are very important—so that they can have some idea and some imagination of possible alternative worlds which existed in the past, which will enable them to detach themselves for a brief moment of their childhood from the pressures of the media that will engulf them for the rest of their lives.

For that reason and for the practical reason that I mentioned earlier—that we must not try to over-cram the curriculum—I believe that, once again, my right hon. and learned Friend has exercised in the right direction what I described earlier as his Johnsonian judgment.

11.14 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) is right in believing that it is not as a result of oversight that the House is deciding what subjects shall be taught in schools and how they will be taught. It is a consequence of deliberate policy. Listening to the Secretary of State in his opening speech, however, one would have thought that we were not doing it at all. First, the right hon. and learned Gentleman made a virtue of the fact that he is merely implementing the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council, ignoring the fact that the debate is about the points at which he has departed from those recommendations. Secondly, he said, "Of course the Government are not stopping anybody doing anything. We are simply saying what is in the curriculum. If they want to teach something else, they can." The whole philosophy of a national curriculum is to ensure that some subjects are seen as essential, with the inevitable consequence that the others are regarded as relatively inessential. It does not help to say, "There is nothing to stop teachers teaching them." The whole purpose of the policy is to upgrade some subjects and, necessarily, to reduce the primacy of the others.

If the orders are approved, it will be possible for children to emerge from the education system with no knowledge of history after 1918, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said. If it is possible for that to happen, with no incentives for teachers to concentrate on matters outside the curriculum, it is inevitable that it will happen. Children will emerge with no sense of their history. The Conservative party used to

[Mr. Peter Archer]

claim to be the party of history—the party that emphasised our national identity. Winston Churchill never gave up saying that things came from a sense of history.

The right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) listed some of the advantages of history. Let me add one other. History provides a sense of pride—of self-respect. I have seen that happen. When I was a child in the industrial black country, people were ashamed to say where they lived. They thought that they were personally downgraded by the landscape in which they lived. Thanks to the efforts of those who have brought to life our local history and have regarded it as part of our identity, local people are now proud of their history, traditions and dialect and of their grorty pudding. History is self-respect.

We are now saying, "People must learn about what happened a long time ago. They cannot learn about their immediate history." The Secretary of State faces two difficulties as a result of that approach. The first entails the purpose set out in his own document, which says:

"Pupils should be taught to understand how the world in which they live has been shaped by developments in twentieth-century history."

If the essential instalment is missing from the account, how are pupils to understand how the world in which they live has been shaped? If the history of the middle east stops short of the six-day war or—if the Secretary of State relents—at the time when the Shah was still ruling Iran, how will pupils understand how the middle east, as we know it today, is still in existence?

The Secretary of State faces another difficulty. The right hon. and learned Gentleman himself raised a question about the nature of history. I do not believe that there is any better way to inculcate a sense of history than by placing it in the context of people whom children have seen and heard. Let me tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman a parable.

I had a son who, in the fifth form, was required to do a historical project. He happend to select the history of the Labour party. He did a fair amount of research and, after he had got the project written and it was there in academic form, he asked me, "Could you introduce me to some of the people about whom I have been reading?" Some of them were Members of the House. We talked to George Strauss and John Parker. Then my son asked, "You couldn't get Manny Shinwell, could you?' In fear and trembling, I wrote to Manny Shinwell, who was then in another place—*[Laughter.]*—another other place. He was extremely kind. He wrote back, saying that he would be happy to see us but that he could not give us more than 20 minutes. We went to see him, and after the first hour and a half we had reached 1926. The octogenarian and the 15-year-old struck sparks off each other; they both came alive. The teaching staff were queuing up to read that project. It was not current affairs; it was history. It gave a sense of history. It did all the things that history is required to do.

On the other hand, the Secretary of State has placed himself on the side of those people—to whom he referred—who think that history is about the dead. Does he remember Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn saying:

"The widow told me about Moses, and for a time I was in a sweat to find out all about him. But, bye and bye, she let on that he was dead, and after that I didn't want to hear any more, because I don't take no stock in dead folks."

The bridge between "Huckleberry Finn" and contemporary history for the kids of today is precisely what the Secretary of State is destroying. He wants to turn history into an affair of ghosts. He can bury history for the moment, but after the next election my right hon. Friend may disinter it. I warn the Secretary of State that history has a habit of taking its revenge.

11.21 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): We have just heard from the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), a very interesting speech illustrating the good sense of what my right hon. and learned Friend proposes. The entire speech of the right hon. and learned Member delighted me by underlining the fact that historical matters such as that about which his son was writing can still be written about. The right hon. and learned Gentleman misses the point entirely.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison), I regret that history is not a core subject. I infinitely regret that pupils will be allowed to give it up at the age of 14. These are great misfortunes. However, on the central point that is the subject of this debate, I support my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that, when he was learning history, there were many gaps. The hon. Gentleman's experience is repeated all over the country. In the Palace of Westminster, I have met hundreds of children who know nothing at all about the Tudors or the Stuarts, nothing at all about those great formative centuries which saw the reformation and then the revolution that led to the ascendancy of the House of Commons. Those children were not taught about such things. Far too many history teachers concentrated on the recent past. However, we now have a disciplined framework. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I taught history. I tried to ensure that all my pupils left school with a reasonable knowledge of English history right through. That is terribly important.

Several hon. Members have referred to the need for a sense of perspective. One cannot have a sense of perspective or of history unless one has a reasonable knowledge of history. The purpose of the national curriculum is to ensure that all our children will have a reasonable knowledge of the salient facts of their nation's history, and some knowledge of the important facts of international history. Of course, they can know very little in depth, but they need a sense of perspective. We hope that they will strike sparks, and that many of them will pursue history not just academically but throughout their lives as a burning personal interest.

I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for the way in which he discussed with me the question of the 20-year period. I told him that the order as originally drafted was wrong. In accepting that, he made a very good decision. We now have a sensible curriculum, which does not dictate or exclude, but makes sure that the experience of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will not be repeated. I refer to the undue concentration on the recent past, and the lack of regard for the more distant past.

Any decent history teacher will always draw comparisons and use analogies to try to excite interest. We cannot talk about the ambitions of Napoleon without talking about the ambitions of Hitler to conquer this

country. We cannot talk about the events in the middle east immediately after the first world war without talking about what has recently happened. We cannot talk about the history of Ireland in the 18th century without talking about what has happened since. We cannot talk about Catholic emancipation in 1829 without talking about the repercussions that are still being felt to this day. Any sensible history teacher will talk about these things.

We are merely saying that the lazy history teacher—there have been far too many of them—should not get away with merely reading yesterday's newspapers and trying to provoke a trivial political discussion. Unfortunately, that is far too often what has happened.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has made a sensible move. I have talked to several historians over recent weeks, and they have told me that they felt deeply disturbed by the original draft order but feel happier about the amendments. Many of them regret that history is not a core subject. All of them regret, as I do, that history can be dropped at the age of 14. We should consider both matters again. I hope that we all regard the national curriculum as to a degree experimental. We must learn from it, at least in these first years. I hope that it will be amended and that, by the turn of the century, history will be a core subject and there will be no question of dropping it before the age of 16.

We have not made a bad beginning, and my right hon. and learned Friend is doing nothing iconoclastic. He is doing nothing stupid. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) made an excellent speech from the Opposition Back Benches. I have great respect for him. Unfortunately, his main themes were irrelevant in the context of the debate. All the matters to which he referred can still be taught and discussed in the classroom, and will be by intelligent and lively history teachers.

Tonight, we see a beginning. What my right hon. and learned Friend has done is sensible and justifiable. The debate has not produced the last word, because I am sure that we shall return to these matters. How good it is that the House is debating the teaching of history, which is the ultimate subject, and therefore the most important of all.

11.28 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): It is ironic that Parliament should consider that it is worth spending only 37 minutes on history in terms of the national curriculum, and only 37 minutes on geography. If the issues are as important as some have suggested, the Government could surely have used parliamentary procedures to give us more time.

As an ex-geography teacher, I find unpalatable the attempt to impose a national curriculum. I believe that it will do great harm to what goes on in school. I know that it is far better to teach in school what we have experience of, based on our teaching skills, rather than to teach in the absence of background knowledge. I suggest that my geography lessons were interesting and exciting to pupils because I could teach them about things with which I was familiar and understood. I could insert that material into my teaching. From that I could teach the skills that were essential rather than the things that others thought important.

How many geography teachers throughout the country will be happy to throw away the materials that they have built up over the years and that have served them well in their teaching? Can the Secretary of State make sufficient resources available to ensure that teachers in future can teach with the same enthusiasm when they deal with the new areas of the syllabus? Can he provide the slides, films and text books? Will there be money for fieldwork? I very much doubt whether that will be the case.

My final complaint is that the Secretary of State has opted too much for the idea that we should put places on maps instead of an understanding about them. People enjoy "spot the ball" at my Labour club. However, trying to place Birmingham in the right spot on a map is a pretty useless exercise. I recall marking such exercises. One mark was awarded if the pupil was within a certain radius of the correct spot and half a mark if he was a little further away. What does all that really mean? It is far more important for a pupil to have an idea of where Birmingham is in relation to——

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)):—*

The House divided: Ayes 184, Noes 289.

Division No. 130] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Allen, Graham	Fatchett, Derek
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Faulds, Andrew
Armstrong, Hilary	Fearn, Ronald
Ashton, Joe	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Fisher, Mark
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Flannery, Martin
Barron, Kevin	Flynn, Paul
Battle, John	Foster, Derek
Beckett, Margaret	Foulkes, George
Beith, A. J.	Fraser, John
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Fyfe, Maria
Benton, Joseph	Galloway, George
Bermingham, Gerald	Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Blair, Tony	George, Bruce
Boateng, Paul	Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Boyes, Roland	Golding, Mrs Llin
Bradley, Keith	Gordon, Mildred
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Gould, Bryan
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Buckley, George J.	Grocott, Bruce
Caborn, Richard	Hain, Peter
Callaghan, Jim	Hardy, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Harman, Ms Harriet
Canavan, Dennis	Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Hinchliffe, David
Clelland, David	Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Cohen, Harry	Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Hood, Jimmy
Corbett, Robin	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy	Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Cousins, Jim	Hoyle, Doug
Crowther, Stan	Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Cryer, Bob	Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Dalyell, Tam	Illsley, Eric
Darling, Alistair	Ingram, Adam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*	Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*	Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*	Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Dewar, Donald	Kirkwood, Archy
Dixon, Don	Leadbitter, Ted
Doran, Frank	Leighton, Ron
Duffy, A. E. P.	Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Dunnachie, Jimmy	Lewis, Terry
Eadie, Alexander	Livsey, Richard
Eastham, Ken	Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*

Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William

Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 19 February, be approved.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8745/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 6th March 1991 relating to sweeteners for use in foodstuffs; and supports the Government's intention to provide the maximum safeguard for consumers by limiting the use of sweeteners in food to the minimum amount necessary to fulfil the function intended and above all in accordance with the acceptable daily intake levels approved by the independent expert safety committees.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting to-morrow, the Motions in the name of Mr. Francis Maude relating to Estimates and Supplementary Estimates 1991-92 (Class VIII, Vote 14) (Community Charge and rate rebate grants, emergency assistance to local authorities, non-domestic rates outturn payments, etc., England), (Class XV, Vote 22) (Rate rebate grants, transitional relief and community charge reduction grants, Scotland) and (Class XVI, Vote 11) (Rate rebate grants and community charge reduction grants, Wales) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, whichever is the later, and, if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put successively the Questions necessary to dispose of them.

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 1st May, if proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. John MacGregor relating to Broadcasting, &c., have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at Seven o'clock put the Question or Questions necessary to dispose of them, including the Questions on any Amendments to the said Motion which he may have selected.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Power Lines (North Yorkshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a matter of considerable concern to many of my constituents. I refer to the construction of overhead power lines in my constituency and neighbouring areas. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, who is present to respond, to my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), who will say a few words when I have said mine, and to others from neighbouring constituencies who are here to listen to the debate, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) and for York (Mr. Gregory), and, for some reason, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden).

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): For old time's sake.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is here for old time's sake.

The immediate cause of the public disquiet and anger in my constituency is the proposal by the National Grid Company to construct new transmission lines running from Lackenby in Cleveland to Picton in north Yorkshire, and then south to Shipton near York. The proposals have been brought forward by the National Grid Company because of its obligations to link to the national system a new gas-fired power station at the ICI Wilton complex on Teesside, which received planning permission last November and is now under construction.

The power station project is an imaginative enterprise, undertaken privately, and I make no criticism of it. Equally, the National Grid Company is only discharging the duties that Parliament has laid upon it. The cause of our difficulty, and the reason for the debate, is that the construction of the power station and the lines to serve it have been treated for planning purposes as two separate events, with the result that the power station received planning permission without any apparent consideration being given to the environmental impact of the subsequent construction of 60 miles of pylons across a fine rural landscape.

My argument is that such disconnected procedures are an inadequate way to make such decisions, that it would be in the interests of the nation and of the National Grid Company to adopt better procedures, and that the failure to take account of the impact on north Yorkshire means that the Secretary of State must be especially vigilant and stringent in the environmental standards that he applies to the forthcoming application to build power lines across north Yorkshire.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The power lines will go through my hon. Friend's constituency and a considerable distance through mine. As well as the far-reaching consultations about this matter—that the National Grid Company, to its credit, has promised—should we not consider the need to lay power cable lines across the north of England, and why there was no public consultation about that when planning consent was granted for the power station in Cleveland?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, on which I shall touch later. I thank him for his intervention and support.

To make an analogy to what has happened on a more human scale, it is as if I were to propose to my hon. Friend the Minister that I should build a house on a plot adjacent to his home. The plot is well screened and out of site, he believes that I will be a good neighbour, he raises no objection, planning permission is duly given and I start to build my house. Then I say to him, "By the way, I need a driveway and the only place I can put it is through your front garden, because no one else will agree to have it." Surely he cannot object to my driveway. Everyone knows that a house has to have access. Well, everyone knows that a power station has to be linked to the national grid, but it was only after planning permission had been given that it became apparent in my constituency that a £2 million project would be needed and that most of it would pass down the vale of York.

The report of the chief planning officer of North Yorkshire county council, to be considered by the council planning committee tomorrow, states the problem clearly, saying:

"the County Council now finds itself in the position of having to react to proposals for major new environmentally intrusive transmission facilities running across a large section of the country, put forward as a direct result of an earlier decision over which it had no influence. Clearly, it is most unsatisfactory that permission for such a major expansion of power facilities can be granted without all the implications, including those for adjoining areas, being considered. Members may feel that this is a national issue of principle."

Well might it think so.

The European Community directive on environmental assessment of 1985, under article 3 and annexe III, requires an environmental impact assessment to identify, describe and assess the direct, indirect and secondary effects of a project on the environment. That information has to be submitted to the competent authority—in this case the Secretary of State—before a decision on consent is taken. In this case, it clearly was not.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England has already written to the European Commission to point out the inconsistency between the EC directive, which says that a project should be considered in the round, and the evident policy in this country, which is to consider each bit piecemeal—a process which makes it difficult to object to the next relevant piece.

My hon. Friend the Minister might think that my constituents are just having an attack of NIMBY—not in my backyard. They are, of course, as entitled to be nimbies as anyone else, especially as they go to great lengths to preserve the highly attractive appearance of the outstanding countryside in which they live. However, this case raises wider issues. What if, to take an extreme case, new power stations were built in the north of Scotland or, if we want to be really extreme, in the Orkneys or Shetlands? Would the National Grid Company have to link them to the national network? What if there had been no gap between the two Yorkshire national parks, and the proposed lines had to run through a national park, without the Secretary of State having considered that fact when giving planning permission for a new station? That is an utterly inadequate way to make decisions of such importance in a country that is so crowded and so sensitive to the need to preserve its most magnificent countryside.

We shall be doing the electricity industry no favours if we allow decisions to be made in such a way. Future power stations will encounter greater public opposition if the wider environmental consequences are not clarified, and a bad name will be given to the privatisation of the industry, which in every other respect I, for one—along with my hon. Friends who are present tonight—emphatically support.

Clearly, in this case, the damage has now partly been done. The National Grid Company must connect the station to the grid, and provide for the distribution of the electricity that it will generate. I stress that the company's officials are discharging their own responsibilities with considerable care, and are taking pains to consult local people about the precise routes to be taken. My quarrel is not with them, but with the procedures that have put them in such a position.

The Department of Energy now has two specific responsibilities to the residents of north Yorkshire, which it must fulfil before it gives approval to any proposed power lines—a procedure that is much more likely to require public inquiries as a result of what has happened. First, it should be absolutely sure before it gives approval that the new lines are needed—this relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale—and that the intended capacity to transmit from north to south is really necessary. Secondly, it should insist that the environmental impact of the power lines is minimised by every possible means.

Let me expand on each of these points. First, there is much suspicion that the proposed power lines will have a capacity far beyond that required to cater for the one new power station so far approved. Up to four additional power stations in the seaside area are now mooted in some quarters. The national grid might sensibly argue that we must provide for possible future transmissions, but do we really want so many additional power stations in the north of England when the excess of demand is in the south?

Some local researchers believe that the national grid could cope with the output of the one power station so far approved by upgrading only the more northerly of two lines linking Lackenby with the rest of the grid. Of two proposed 400 kV lines, the Salt Holme to Norton line is much shorter, will run on the same route as the existing 275 kV line and will have much less environmental impact than the proposed 400 kV line from Lackenby to Picton and thence to Shipton, which will run through outstanding open countryside.

No one should think that, however this more southerly route is drawn up, its environmental consequences will be anything other than severe. As the county planning officer puts it:

"There would be major environmental consequences arising from all route options, due both to the intrusive nature of the transmission facilities themselves and to the sensitivity of the whole area through which they must pass. It is impossible to screen the 'supergrid' and there is limited scope for mitigating measures. Difficulties are considered to be especially acute in the section east of Northallerton and Thirsk where all options either pass very close to the boundary of the North York Moors National Park or would need to traverse the open exposed Bullamoor ridge or the relatively unspoilt Cod beck and Sigston Valley. None of the options are considered to be acceptable in this vicinity."

That is the report that the county council will consider tomorrow morning.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister realises that all the route options for the Picton to Shipton line run almost along the edge of the North York Moors national park. It has recently been proposed that the so-called east coast motorway should also run through that area. The people who live there are, not surprisingly, beginning to feel fed up with being regarded as a natural highway for everything that wants to move between north and south, especially as their area is only marginally less attractive, or perhaps no less attractive, than the national park area, which starts at the top of the hill. It is time that we got away from the notion that everything that is just inside a national park is sacrosanct, while everything just outside it is fair game for motorways and pylons. We are in danger of creating a severe penalty for living just outside a national park, in which case I shall soon be asking for an Adjournment debate on expanding the boundaries of the national parks.

Mr. John Greenway: It is the same with the green belts.

Mr. Hague: It is indeed.

That aside, let us assume that my hon. Friend the Minister feels, as I do, that the environmental consequences of what has been agreed to will be serious. Let us also assume that, having investigated to the full the need for the additional lines on the route through north Yorkshire, he finds that they are definitely necessary. Let us assume further that he considers shorter routes across the national park itself to be unacceptable. I am sure that they would be unacceptable to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale. I hope that at the end of all these deliberations he will do his utmost to ensure that every possible step is taken to minimise the impact on my constituents and their environment.

The proposed pylons have a design life of 80 years. We are talking about something with which our grandchildren—even mine—will have to live. I should not like to be in the shoes of the electricity industry if it is discovered 10 years from now that electro-magnetic fields from power lines have a serious effect on human health. I should not like to be in the shoes of the Department of Energy if it is discovered five years from now that there is a cheap and efficient way to place lengthy power lines underground.

National Grid officials are very wary—perhaps they are right to be—of suggestions that parts of the lines should go underground. They warn of the cost, the digging up of a great deal of land and of the difficulties of maintaining lines that have been buried. Other people, who also know a great deal about the industry, particularly Professor Scott who lives in our area, have advised me that this need no longer be the case, or that soon it need no longer be the case, and that recent technological developments being pioneered on the continent make substantial lengths of underground power lines a realistic possibility. I do not have the information or the expertise to evaluate such claims, but I hope that my hon. Friend's Department is aware of these developments and that, if not, it will take the trouble to find out about them.

Failing that possibility, I am also given to understand that new and shorter pylons are being developed, designed with the same work load in mind but 11m shorter than the current standard 440kV pylon. Other ideas involve more slender steel poles that I understand could be produced in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South. Perhaps a combination of all these methods could be used in north Yorkshire to minimise the

[Mr. Hague]

damage to our landscape—a landscape that is enjoyed each year not only by tens of thousands of local people but by an even greater number of visitors.

I shall send to my hon. Friend the Minister some of the deeply troubled letters that I have received from constituents—from the owner of a well-used private airfield near the village of Bagley, where the operation of aircraft may become severely restricted or impossible, to the owner of a herd of pedigree holstein-friesians, who is likely to have 400kV lines running through the middle of his farm, and to a large number of members of the public who simply appreciate the countryside around them.

It is not good enough that the decision on these matters should have been reduced to recognising a virtual fait accompli because of inadequate and unsatisfactory planning procedures. My constituents have a legitimate grievance, and it must be addressed tonight.

11.57 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks. (Mr. Hague) for allowing me a few moments of his precious Adjournment debate. As the power lines projected by National Grid go through my constituency before they reach my hon. Friend's, I am glad to have this opportunity to speak in the debate.

A few years ago the Environment Select Committee, of which I am a member, looked into the question of the acid rain produced by power stations. When worthy, decent and nice people built them all those years ago, they felt, quite rightly, that if the chimneys were high enough they would have no detrimental effect. Modern technology has proved that that is not true. That is why a great deal of money is now being spent on providing power station filters and making them cleaner. As yet, there is no evidence one way or the other that electro-magnetic force from the power lines has any detrimental effect on human health. However, these will be bigger and stronger power lines than those that were used in the past.

I cannot help but feel that it may not be too long before we discover that there are detrimental effects. Everybody will then throw up their hands in horror and say, "Why on earth didn't somebody look into this and think about it at the right time?"

Most of my constituents would opt for the proposal that the power lines should be placed underground. I am told that there are technical reasons why that does not affect the electro-magnetic field. That may be. Nevertheless, it is the option that we ought to be considering for the future. As my hon. Friend said, these power lines are built not just for now but for a long way into the future. As yet it has not been proved that such powerful cables are needed.

I am told that it may be technically difficult to put everything underground, yet we have electricity from France which travels not merely underground but under the sea. We have the technical capacity, but we do not have the will. I am told that there is no will to do that because it would prove too expensive—it would be 16 or 20 times dearer. That depends on the accountant. The accountant could spread the capital expenditure over 60 years instead of the proposed 40 years, or even longer if the life of the equipment is 80 years. Why should our part of the north-east bear the entire burden of the national grid? Why should the rest of the country not pay for some of it? The on-costs over 80 years for every unit of current would be about 0·000001p. That would not materially affect people's bills around the country.

I agree with my hon. Friend about planning applications. Had we known about the present problems, we might have suggested that instead of building the power station on ICI's ground—because of a quirk of this place, ICI can award itself planning permission under an obscure 1948 Act—we should run the gas in pipelines down to the midlands where the electricity was required. The power stations could have been built there instead of spoiling the beautiful north Yorkshire moors and dales in my constituency.

Our constituents in the north-east have nuclear power stations and four or five applications for additional toxic waste burners; now we have another burden to bear. It is unnecessary. The power lines could go underground. The cost factor does not enter into the argument. If it is feasible to bring electricity from France under the sea, it must be feasible to run it under the ground. I am told that it would make some of the ground sterile. Perhaps it would, but I am sure that local people would prefer that.

Why do not sewers run on the surface? We bury them because they are unsightly. They do not need to be on the surface and they can provide an adequate service underground. The same could apply to power lines if there was a will.

There is great resistance to the proposals, and the Government would be well advised to listen to those of us who have spoken from the Conservative Back Benches tonight. We are speaking as friends. We do not want to get into a fight with the Government or National Grid. We want to work something out. We do not believe the arguments that we need the power lines to provide sufficient capacity for the future or that they could not be buried. The arguments about costs do not hold water.

I am grateful for the opportunity to add a few comments to the debate. I look forward to my hon. Friend's reply. I can tell him that it does not represent the beginning and end of the story; it is merely the opening shots.

12.2 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on securing the debate and on the forceful and effective way in which he has represented the concerns of his constituents. I know the part of the world that he represents. I used to live in north Yorkshire, so I am aware of the beauty of some of the scenery to which he has referred.

The background to the debate is set by the statutory responsibilities of the National Grid Company. It has obligations under the Electricity Act 1989 through its transmission licence, first, to offer terms for connection within 90 days to prospective connections to the grid, and if such terms are accepted NGC must provide connections to its system. Secondly, it must carry out any necessary extension or reinforcement work resulting from that connection.

My hon. Friend referred to the transmission links for the ICI-Enron Teesside plant. My right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State has not received an application from the National Grid Company for consent to construct or reconstruct overhead power lines in north Yorkshire. Consent was granted in December for two short stretches of 275 kV overhead line, linking the new Enron scheme with the Lackenby sub-station. Those are the only two lines solely related to the Enron project. The National Grid Company is planning further line reinforcements in the area, which have been the main subject of this evening's debate.

It would be helpful if I mentioned general procedures. If and when applications for overhead line work in north Yorkshire are received, they will be fully and carefully considered by my Department. The regulations enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to call for an environmental statement to be submitted. The National Grid Company has undertaken to provide an environmental statement for all major new transmission lines. The project must be advertised and a period allowed for representations to my right hon. Friend.

If any of the relevant planning authorities objects to the proposal and its objections cannot be met by modifying it, my right hon. Friend is obliged to arrange a public inquiry. Even if the relevant planning authorities do not object, my right hon. Friend may still arrange a public inquiry in the light of other objections received. He will decide that on the individual merits of the case.

My right hon. Friend—my hon. Friend; I am anticipating events—the Member for Richmond and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) asked whether a transmission application should be considered when consent for a new power station is granted. The Electricity and Pipelines (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1990, which implement the relevant EC directive, provide that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State shall not grant consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 unless he has first taken environmental information into consideration. Environmental information in this context means the environmental statement submitted by the applicant and any representations made about the likely effects of the proposed development.

Teesside Power's environmental statement referred to the need for a link with, and uprating of, the grid, but those matters were not its responsibility and it could not be expected to provide detailed information on them.

The National Grid Company's programme of strengthening the grid in the north—this is an important point in answer to my hon. Friends—is not solely to meet the needs of Teesside power station but to meet other neeeds such as the upgrading of the Anglo-Scottish interconnector.

It would not have been appropriate, therefore, for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to have required Teesside Power to provide environmental information that only another developer—the National Grid Company—could provide. When applications for new transmission lines through north Yorkshire are made, an environmental statement will be provided and the environmental assessment procedure, as required by the regulations, will be carried out.

It must be borne in mind that delay in considering power station applications is contrary to the Government's expressed intention of reaching timely decisions. If all applications had to take into account all the possible considerations and consequences, no decision could be timely. It is therefore appropriate for applications to be considered on individual merit if and when they are made.

My hon. Friends referred to the speed with which the line may have to be constructed. The grid system must adapt to meet developments. Now that the National Grid Company is in the private sector, I hope that it will respond in a businesslike way to opportunities and its statutory responsibilities. I assure my hon. Friends that adequate time remains for all proper procedures to be carried out. The National Grid Company's statutory responsibilities to the community and the environment in developing line routes is in no way diminished. There is also the safeguard that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will pick up any points of concern when considering applications.

My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) asked about undergrounding lines. As he is aware, undergrounding lines is generally considerably more expensive than constructing lines overhead. I disagree with his statement that this is not an important matter. Undergrounding lines can cost between 10 and 15 times as much as constructing the equivalent length of overhead line, which must be an important consideration. It also takes longer and it is more expensive to locate and rectify faults if they involve underground cable.

It should not be thought that undergrounding lines in rural areas is necessarily without environmental impact. No development is permitted over a cable once it is laid. The necessary trench work, particularly at sensitive ecological and archaeological sites, is not without its environmental problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh also mentioned health effects. Of course the Government know about them, but at present they have not been proven. We have an open mind about any possible health risks. Further work is proceeding to find out the effects, but at present we can reach no conclusion and there is no good reason for not proceeding with strengthening the grid system.

I take my hon. Friend's points seriously. The National Grid Company is still formulating its proposals and consulting. I shall ensure that my hon. Friends' comments are drawn to its attention. When the company applies to my Department, I shall ensure that they are immediately informed.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Twelve o'clock .

House of Commons

Tuesday 30 April 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TAY ROAD BRIDGE ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Lords amendment agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Gulf War

1. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments have been made of the efficiency of exotic conventional weapons by Britain and coalition forces in the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's question as I do not recognise the term "exotic" conventional weapons. I assure him that all aspects of the Gulf conflict are being investigated and assessed.

Mr. Flynn: I hope that I can enlighten the right hon. Gentleman. Will he confirm that the fuel air explosive bomb, used for the first time by the Americans in conflict without prior consultation with Britain, has a blast as destructive as a nuclear weapon, is deadlier than chemical weapons, cannot be accurately targeted and was almost certainly responsible for the collateral extermination of thousands of Iraqi conscripts? Will he also confirm that the bomb is already in the possession of Saddam Hussein and other deranged tyrants and that it is on sale in the arms bazaars of the world? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm today——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Flynn: —that he will press for the 1981 convention on inhumane weapons to be used to control the sale and use of fuel air explosives, daisy-cutter bombs and cluster bombs, which are not conventional weapons but exotic weapons——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is being unfair to his colleagues. That is enough.

Mr. Flynn *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is disgraceful.

Mr. Clark: Every single fact that the hon. Gentleman cited was wrong. Fuel air explosives were used by the United States only to clear minefields. I know that a number of Opposition Members, of whom the hon. Gentleman is presumably one, would prefer to fight all battles with loudhailers and food parcels, but that attitude is not shared by those who sit on this side of the House. Our purpose was to end the conflict as speedily as possible, with the minimum of British casualties.

Mr. Sayeed: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the troops down there were delighted by just how effective these very modern weapons were? It was a considerable surprise to many that they worked as effectively as they did.

Mr. Clark: It is perfectly true that the conflict was extremely effective. It provided a determinant test for a whole range of our equipment. The lessons are being assessed and will be of very great value.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Due to the unsatisfactory nature of the answer and the importance of the matter, I give notice that I shall seek to raise it on the Adjournment at the earliest opportunity.

2. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimated total cost of *(a)* the war in the Gulf and *(b)* his Department's assistance to Kurdish refugees.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): The latest estimate for the additional defence costs of the Gulf conflict, to be spread over several years, is of the order of £2·5 billion. Contributions to these costs already made or pledged by other countries now exceed £2 billion. It is not yet possible to estimate the total cost of helping Kurdish refugees, but the full Ministry of Defence cost of aircraft, helicopters and 3 Commando Brigade, when deployed, will be at least £2 million a week.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the Minister accept that that is a shameful statistic? Why is it that the Government can respond so readily with massive resources for war, yet respond so inadequately to help the tragic Kurdish refugees in Iraq, Turkey and Iran and the Shias in the south?

Mr. King: The hon. Lady decided on her supplementary question before she listened to the answer. I said that the overwhelming cost of the Gulf conflict is being met by contributions from other nations, for which we are extremely grateful. If she were prepared to speak up for her country occasionally, she would recognise that of all the countries that have responded to the Kurdish problem she need not feel ashamed of or seek to criticise this country, whose contribution, in terms of forces, helicopters and the aid that we have given, compares very favourably with that of any other country.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you will agree that the Minister should withdraw that disgraceful remark.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Lady has once more demonstrated that she is more adept at criticising Britain than supporting it? Does he further agree that Britain has every reason to be proud of its contribution not only to the Gulf war, but to the relief operation for the Kurds? Are not the armed forces doing as much as the relief organisations?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was trying to point out to the hon. Lady, as she would have heard had

she listened to my answer, that I hoped that she would take pride in the contributions made by our airmen and helicopter pilots instead of leaping up to criticise their efforts. They come from her constituency as well. Why does not she speak up for the efforts that they are making to help alleviate a desperate and tragic situation in which all help is needed? I agree with her about one thing——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but I remind him that he is answering a question from his hon. Friend.

Mr. King: I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend in reinforcing the point that I was making to the hon. Lady.

Mr. O'Neill: In the light of the Secretary of State's point that the cost of the Gulf war will be somewhere in the region of £5 billion, why is it taking so long to produce the defence estimates this year? Will they incorporate the long-term costing overruns that have been reported in the press and are widely believed to be £21 billion over the next 10 years?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman is getting a bit muddled. He probably knows that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary has already confirmed that the defence estimate for this year is likely to be about £1·5 billion above its planned level. I have already had discussions with the Treasury about that. I have also made it clear to the House that it is vital that we learn the lessons of the events in the Gulf in carrying forward our plans. Before the summer recess I hope to publish the annual defence White Paper, in which I shall make clear the way ahead for "Options for Change".

Missiles

3. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent meetings he has held with the aerospace industry about new generation missiles and on-going research.

Mr. Alan Clark: My ministerial colleagues and I have regular contacts with the aerospace industry at which a wide range of issues is discussed.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that brief reply. Does he accept that British Aerospace Dynamics has devoted many years and a great deal of money to the advanced short-range air-to-air missile project and makes a major contribution to the research and manufacturing base of our defence industries? Will he ensure that any decision that is likely to be taken by his Department bears that in mind so that the company can continue to make a major contribution to employment and to the health of the economy in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. We have corresponded on the subject and I pay tribute to the detailed knowledge with which he expresses his mastery of the topic. It is perfectly true that British Aerospace has done a considerable amount of what will prove to be valuable work on the advanced short-range air-to-air missile, which will be the successor to the Sidewinder missile and which the United Kingdom still judges to be an essential enhancement to our air fighting capability. However, as my hon. Friend also knows, the original collaborative programme formed under a memorandum of understanding with the United States has, effectively, collapsed and for that reason we must go through well-established procurement procedures and issue a new invitation to tender which I have done today. We await a response and I assume that British Aerospace will be among those responding.

Mr. Rogers: I was appalled at Ministers' answers to some of the earlier questions from my hon. Friends. We certainly do not need lessons in patriotism from the Conservative party.

Is the Minister of State aware of the substantial redundancies taking place in the aerospace industry? Does he realise that unless he stops dithering and makes some choices for "Options for Change", many highly skilled personnel in this country will be out of jobs?

Mr. Clark: It is, of course, a general truth that the reduction in defence spending worldwide has led to redundancies in certain specialised industries, nowhere more than in the United States. I regret the fact that some skilled craftsmen may face redundancy, but I believe that their skills will be such that they will not be redundant for very long. That has nothing to do with the "Options for Change" exercise, but is British Aerospace anticipating its commercial decisions and programme. In the fullness of time, "Options for Change" will set the pattern for development in future years.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the outstanding importance of the missile industry in this country and bring forward purchase decisions wherever possible?

Mr. Clark: Bringing forward purchase decisions is subject also to resource and budgetary constraints. I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the importance of the missile industry. I am fully aware of the fact that British Aerospace plays a key role in our indigenous missile capability.

Tornado F3

4. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the performance of the Tornado F3 aircraft in the Gulf war.

9. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the performance of the Foxhunter radar fitted to the Tornado F3 in the Gulf and elsewhere during the last nine months.

Mr. Alan Clark: During the period of the Gulf crisis, including hostilities, RAF Tornado F3 aircraft flew over 2,000 operational combat air patrol sorties and made a valuable contribution to coalition air defence forces. The performance of all aircraft and equipment used in the Gulf operation, including the F3 and the Foxhunter radar, is being evaluated.

Mr. Campbell: Does the Minister accept that his comments about the Royal Air Force will be particularly well received at RAF Leuchars in my constituency where 43 Squadron, which served with such distinction in the Gulf, is usually based? Has not the review of the performance of the F3 served only to underline the need for its supplement and eventual replacement by the European fighter aircraft? How confident is the Minister that the European fighter aircraft will reach the production

stage? Is his confidence dented to any extent by the continuing uncertainty about Germany's participation in the production stage of the programme?

Mr. Clark: We are currently assessing studies into options for the future of the Tornado F3 and I hope to announce our conclusions shortly. As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the House will be debating Royal Air Force matters on Thursday this week. There is a question on the prospects for EFA later on the Order Paper, but I am entirely confident that the aircraft will move into production investment and later into the production stage.

Mr. Mans: I thank my right hon. Friend for his earlier answer. Does the Foxhunter radar meet the original specification laid down by the Royal Air Force?

Mr. Clark: Yes, the Foxhunter radar has already exceeded the original specification. In fact, there is an enhancement programme, which was originally intended to be complete in October this year, but which has been brought forward in respect of the aircraft operating in the Gulf. For that reason, it has not been uniformly faultless in its implementation, but considerable improvements have been made to the Foxhunter radar fitted to aircraft in the Gulf during the war.

Mr. Dalyell: Could the House of Commons have a polite answer to a polite question? What is the truth or otherwise of the reports coming out of Washington that the accuracy of the coalition bombing was nothing like what was claimed during the Gulf war? Are they true or false?

Mr. Clark: I hope that I am always polite to the hon. Gentleman, who is always very polite to me. The under-secretary-general of the United Nations, Mr. Ahtisaari, has conducted an investigation and written a report. The hon. Gentleman will probably not welcome his judgment that the strategic bombing was conducted with the highest accuracy. It was perfectly clear that every effort had been made to avoid civilian casualties.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the clear lessons to emerge from the Gulf war is the urgent need for an agile air superiority aircraft in battlefield conditions? The Royal Air Force has no such aircraft.

Mr. Clark: I would not go so far as to say that, because in many circumstances the Tornado F3 is an excellent aircraft. As my hon. Friend knows, it was designed to intercept Soviet bombers over the north Norway sea. There are many lessons to be drawn on air superiority, air domination and equipment and, as I have told the House several times, they are all being carefully investigated and assessed.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Having reviewed the performance of Tornados, will the Minister turn his attention to Buccaneer jets? A potentially catastrophic incident took place off the coast of my constituency yesterday, when a Buccaneer jet took evasive action and missed a ferry by only 40 ft. We accept that pilots must train, but does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is wrong for them to do so along busy ferry lanes?

Mr. Clark: The hon. Lady is right to make that point on behalf of her constituents. We have the report, but all that I can tell her is that the incident is being looked into.

European Fighter Aircraft

5. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the latest developments for the European fighter aircraft project.

Mr. Alan Clark: The European fighter aircraft development programme proceeds with the full support of all four partner nations. Work is progressing well on the prototype aircraft, the first of which is scheduled to fly in spring next year. Of the 285 airframe equipments, 235 have been selected on a competitive basis. The development of the engine is also proceeding satisfactorily.

Mr. Dykes: I thank the Minister for that reply and reassure him that, unlike the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), I shall not use the question to raise matters about the Tornado. I shall concentrate on the EFA. Subject to what my right hon. Friend may say in Thursday's debate, does he agree that the project is on course, that there is no question of the main partners withdrawing and that no fundamental problems remain with ancillary and related equipment?

Mr. Clark: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. As he rightly said, this will probably be a subject on which further discussion will take place in Thursday's debate.

Mr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that, to some extent, his answer is a vindication of the Government's stand on GEC-Ferranti? As time goes on, the Royal Air Force's case for this plane becomes stronger, not weaker. Is not it fair to say that although a decision on ordering the plane will not be taken for some years, we should not assume that we need all the partners on board to make it a success, although that is the favoured option?

Mr. Clark: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks and for his support in the trying period when we were attempting to put together the GEC-Ferranti deal, with the concept of the EFA radar in the forefront of our minds. With one exception, whom I do not see in the Chamber, all Opposition Members who had a constituency interest were supportive and that played a significant role. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments about proceeding even if all the other partners drop out. That would certainly be my instinct, but there is no denying that it would be extremely expensive. I do not think, I am glad to say, that there is any prospect of that having to be considered.

Wroughton Airfield

6. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future use by his Department of Wroughton airfield.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): The greater part of Wroughton airfield is owned by the Department of the Environment and occupied by the Science museum. On the Ministry of Defence-owned land around the perimeter, various support activities are undertaken by all three services and we have no present plans to change them.

Mr. Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that a recent survey conducted by Swindon chamber of industry and

commerce showed widespread support for the development of a civilian air facility somewhere in the area? Will he bear that in mind when, with the Secretary of State for the Environment, he considers the future of Wroughton?

Mr. C ısle: As I said, at present we have no plans to move an, ɔf our activities from the land that we still own around the perimeter at Wroughton. My hon. Friend has always argued that if we should ever leave, we should fully consult local interests about the best use of the land and we would, of course, do that.

The Gulf

7. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many units are currently engaged in the Gulf area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: There are now some 6,000 service personnel in the Gulf area. An infantry battlegroup with supporting armour is in Kuwait. Further Army units in Saudi Arabia provide its support while organising the return of our equipment to Europe. A squadron of Tornado aircraft is currently based in Bahrain and one destroyer and two frigates continue to patrol the Gulf. Three Royal Navy mine counter-measures vessels and the Royal Engineers are continuing to participate in the international mine clearance operations in the northern Gulf and Kuwait itself. In addition, 20 British officers are serving with the United Nations observation mission, which will take full control of the demilitarised zone along the Iraq-Kuwait border tomorrow.

Mr. Brown: There is a problem about the new imperialism. Why should British troops remain in that part of the world? We must remember that the Security Council has not endorsed that action and that the lives of British troops are being put at risk. Surely the Kurdish problem should be resolved by all the countries in that area, because it goes wider than Iraq. This issue should be resolved through negotiation rather than confrontation. There must—I hope that there will—be a peaceful way out. What will the Minister and the Government do to achieve that aim? Previous Tory Governments have been involved in all sorts of problems in the Gulf area. It is about time that the issue of the Kurdish people was resolved because they have a right to independence.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman is now talking about something that was not in his original question. We have no wish to keep British troops in the Gulf in the long term. At the moment, we are there to ensure a safe handover to the United Nations observation mission which, as the hon. Gentleman would know if he had listened to my answer, is due to take over tomorrow. Soon after that, I hope to see the withdrawal from Kuwait of both the American and our own forces.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the major British contributions to the Gulf campaign was the tri-service co-operation, which was for the good of everybody in the area? Were not regulars, reservists and the Territorial Army able to work together with considerable force for the good of the area both now and in the future?

Mr. King: I certainly endorse that. The reservists, including my hon. Friend, played a valuable part. I need to check the figure, but I believe that some reservists are there at the moment, helping with the withdrawal and recovery of equipment from the Gulf and especially with transport.

Dr. Reid: Will the Secretary of State confirm that British soldiers of the Royal Engineers are to be effectively hired out to a private British company, putting their lives at risk in the dangerous task of locating minefields in Kuwait? Will he further confirm that in that cosy deal both the Royal Ordnance company and the MOD will receive substantial payments for the work, but that none of it will be passed on to the soldiers involved? Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that we are disgracefully misusing our young soldiers if we subcontract them out as cheap labour—and perhaps as cheap lives—to a private, profit-making concern? Does he further realise that that shabby treatment in privatising the operations of our armed forces can do nothing but undermine the morale of our troops after their splendid and courageous efforts in the Gulf war?

Mr. King: That is a disgraceful distortion of what the Corps of Royal Engineers has been doing in Kuwait. The hon. Gentleman does not seem to be aware that since the recovery and liberation of Kuwait, the Corps of Royal Engineers has done excellent work in giving humanitarian relief and in helping the Kuwaiti Government to make it possible for fuel, water and power supplies to be restored, and to remove booby traps from the plants involved. We thought, and the Kuwaiti Government thought it right, that if we were to continue this work, which we have been doing free of charge in a humanitarian cause, they should now pay for the services being provided. Royal Ordnance will be directly responsible for minefield clearance and our engineers will be involved only in locating, surveying and marking minefields. We have said that they will continue that work to enable Royal Ordnance to build up its team to take over. I have specifically insisted that the commander of the 21 EOD squadron should have sole responsibility for deciding on the spot what work shall or shall not be done.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is considerable concern among the Gulf units because the £30 water allowance has been stopped? My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) tells me that that was in the personal gift of the King of Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, will my right hon. Friend agree to consider the problem as temperatures soar, to ensure that the troops have the water supplies that they need?

Mr. King: A problem arose in the first deployment of troops, but I was not aware that it had arisen more recently. However, I shall consider the issue to see whether it has arisen again.

Royal Naval Bases

8. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the numbers currently employed at the royal naval bases.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are currently about 26,000 service personnel and 16,000 civilian personnel employed at Her Majesty's naval bases. Those figures include

personnel serving afloat in ships base ported at the naval bases and support units directly connected with the work of the bases.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister acknowledge that, while "Options for Change" will involve reductions in defence employment generally, and those reductions might be compensated by the private sector, any reductions in employment in the dockyards will be a matter for which his Ministry will be directly responsible? If Ministers make statements—albeit in their constituency capacity—that one naval base will not close, the repercussions on morale in other areas will be severe. Will he confirm that there will be no reduction in employment at Rosyth naval base without prior consultation with, and the approval of, the Scottish Office?

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman has confused two different operations. There is a dockyard at Rosyth, which he mentioned in the first part of his question, and there is a naval base, which he mentioned in the second part. As we have said many times, no decisions have been taken on naval bases and we are considering the future of them all. In view of the smaller Navy envisaged under "Options for Change", it would be wrong not to do so. We shall consider all the relevant factors in reaching a decision.

Mr. David Martin: As my hon. Friend knows, when naval bases are mentioned, people think of Portsmouth. Will he assure me that the contribution made by the work force at the naval base in Portsmouth will be taken into account at all times and that there are no plans to shut the base, because there are rumours, which are sometimes stirred up by the Opposition?

Mr. Carlisle: As my hon. Friend will realise, under "Options for Change", the number of frigates and destroyers is being reduced from 50 to about 40. It would be a dereliction of duty if we did not seek savings at least as great on the support side. We are examining all naval bases, but I confirm that we have no plans to close the base in Portsmouth. As Devonport has also been mentioned, I must say that I deplore attempts by the Opposition to spread as much alarm and fright as possible about that, for purely political reasons. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has made the position absolutely clear: there are no plans to close Devonport.

Mr. Duffy: In any post-Gulf review of the fleet and corresponding support in the dockyards, whether that be achieved in the context of "Options for Change" or as a result of Treasury pressure, will the Minister and the Minister of State for Defence Procurement bear in mind that the last time such a review was undertaken, 10 years ago, it was necessary within a year or so to set in hand a most significant revision? Let us not get it wrong again.

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman is right. We have to take very grave decisions. We shall consider all the factors most carefully.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was able to say, without the benefit of a study, that Devonport was not to close? Can my hon. Friend the Minister today set at rest the minds of my constituents in Portland, who have had the benefit of a study which shows that trying to move the facilities elsewhere would be too expensive? Can he announce today that there will be no closure at Portland naval base?

Mr. Carlisle: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), under "Options for Change" we have to consider all the options open to us. No decisions have yet been taken and we have no plans to close the base at Portland.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Under-Secretary confirm for the benefit of the House that no decisions have been taken to close Rosyth, Devonport or Portland? Therefore, what the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said yesterday is worthless and was simply an electioneering gimmick to try to hold on to Plymouth council for the Tories.

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman is making a false allegation. We were dealing with unfounded rumours and scaremongering. As I said, we are considering all the options. No decisions have yet been made and we shall take those decisions with the greatest care.

Arms Trading

10. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about his Department's role in the trading of arms.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department will continue to support the sales of British defence equipment and services overseas provided that they are compatible with our own security and broader political and humanitarian considerations.

Ms. Ruddock: Learning from the consequences of arming Saddam Hussein, will the Minister instruct the Defence Export Services Organisation to stop promoting sales among other Saddam Husseins around the world? Will he change his Department's policy and make clear what is lethal and non-lethal equipment and support the proposed United Nations arms transfer register? Finally——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly please. This is wide of the original question.

Ms. Ruddock: Finally, will the Minister accept from me that, given continuing oppression in the Gulf, there is considerable revulsion among the British people about the staging of an international arms sale in Birmingham next month? Will he withdraw the Government's support for that event?

Mr. Clark: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated in Luxembourg his full support for a United Nations arms transfer register. That is being pursued rigorously within the United Nations. To be fully effective, such a register would have to be universal and undiscriminatory. However, I remind the hon. Member for Lewisham; Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) that the United Kingdom chairs the experts group in the United Nations, the purpose of which is to measure and to increase transparency in arms transfers. If the hon. Lady reflects on that, she will realise that considerable progress is being made.

Mr. Brazier: Is it not an uncomfortable fact that many extreme and unpleasant third-world regimes have enormous stocks of weaponry, and will continue to

acquire them from the Soviet Union and from other sources over which we have no control? Would it not be a grave dereliction of duty if this country, or other western countries, were to cut off the supply of weapons to our allies, who may need them on occasion to defend themselves from those countries?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is right. The basis of Britain's role is the right to self-defence, and that right is enshrined in article 51 of the United Nations charter.

Mr. Clelland: Is the Minister aware that our trade in arms will be severely and adversely affected if he does not order Challenger 2, as it is now clear that there are friendly nations who are interested in the equipment and are waiting to see what the British Government are going to do? Will he stop the unnecessary dithering and delay over the issue and tell us what his intentions are now?

Mr. Clark: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's attitude. I hope that, in the fullness of time, he will have a quiet word with the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford. I am certainly welll aware of all the factors that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, and they will be borne in mind as we consider the many different elements to which we must pay attention in coming to a decision on the future tank of the British Army.

New Zealand

11. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet the New Zealand Minister of Defence to discuss closer co-operation between the two countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I was in contact with the New Zealand Minister of Defence, Mr. Cooper, about his country's excellent contribution to allied efforts in the Gulf, but we have no early plans to meet. I had a meeting last week with Mr. McKinnon, the New Zealand deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Amos: In view of the extremely close historical and cultural links between the two countries, and given the change of Government in New Zealand last October, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the United Kingdom plays an active part in maintaining the essential defence link with that country, which has only 3 million people?

Mr. King: I recognise the close relationship that we have had with New Zealand and continue to have in many aspects of defence. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces is with the New Zealand Defence Minister at this moment at the five power defence arrangements conference in Malaysia. We shall certainly seek to develop our defence arrangements.

United Nations Forces

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to his Department of the British contribution to the United Nations forces.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The cost of United Kingdom support for United Nations forces is met by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by payment to the Ministry of Defence for the assistance provided.

Mr. Hughes: Many people will welcome the announcement that British forces are to be replaced by United Nations forces in Iraq. Does the Minister agree that the most effective use of British forces abroad is under the United Nations flag?

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We can all welcome the Prime Minister's brave initiative in northern Iraq. The sending of United Nations troops there is under discussion in the United Nations.

Gulf War

13. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent to which the future procurement of equipment for the armed forces will be affected by the experience of the Gulf war.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are considering the outcome of the campaign and the conclusions to be drawn from it in this as in other areas.

Mr. Trotter: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever the detailed lessons to be learnt from the Gulf campaign may be, there can be no doubt that we still need tanks for the British Army? Does he agree also that there is no reason why we should not proceed with placing a new order and that that order should be for the successful Challenger?

Mr. Clark: I agree with the general lesson that my hon. Friend has drawn. As I have said, we are considering all the elements that we need to consider in coming to a decision on the winner of the competition, and I hope that the decision will not be delayed too long.

Mr. Nellist: Should not one of the lessons of the Gulf war—about the availability of equipment—be absorbed not only within the right hon. Gentleman's Department but commercially? For example, the Birmingham arms fair will open two weeks from today. What is the difference between General Pinochet and Saddam Hussein? Why is the Department laying out the red-carpet treatment for the Butcher of Santiago to come to this country, go to Royal Ordnance plc, go to British Aerospace, and, in two weeks today, go to Birmingham? Has the Department learnt nothing at all from the Gulf?

Mr. Clark: Neither General Pinochet nor Saddam Hussein has ever been, or ever will be, an official guest of the British Government.

Horseshoe Barracks, Shoeburyness

14. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the future of the Horseshoe barracks at Shoeburyness, Essex; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We aim to sell Horseshoe barracks as soon as it is financially viable for us to move out. We hope to apply for outline planning consent later this year.

Mr. Taylor: As this superb site of 22 acres has been virtually surplus to requirements for several years, does the Minister agree that it is time that the Government made up their mind what to do with it? Will he consider the possibility of turning it into a study centre for a university or other institution of learning?

Mr. Carlisle: I understand my hon. Friend's wish to see this site put to a beneficial purpose. The Government are anxious to help, provided that we can afford to move and that we have the support of the local authority for a sensitive development.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Prime Minister recall that when he was a parliamentary candidate in 1983 he gave a commitment, on the questionnaire he returned to the World Development Movement, that he would want to see British aid increased, over a period of five years, to the official United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of the country's national wealth? Will he confirm that the level of official aid is now running at well under half that target figure, at a time when 27 million people on the continent of Africa face the prospect of imminent starvation? Does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that his credibility as Prime Minister is at stake? If he does not find the money to meet the commitment that he made in 1983, his credibility will be severely dented.

The Prime Minister: The important point is that our aid programme is both effective and growing. Where necessary, as the hon. Gentleman will have seen in the case of the Kurds, we provide extra and well-targeted aid. For example, we have now provided more than £60 million to aid the Kurds, and the amount is rising each week. We still accept the principle of the 0·7 per cent. aid target, and like other donors, we shall move to it as and when economic circumstances permit.

Mr. Dunn: Can the Prime Minister give a guarantee that the advanced level examination will be maintained, and not diluted or weakened in any way whatsoever?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will shortly announce comprehensive proposals for 16 to 19-year-olds. I agree with the point that my hon. Friend has made so clearly—that the Opposition's proposals for slimmed-down A-levels are likely to mean more certificates, but certificates of less value.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to reject the view of his Secretary of State for Health, who says that cuts in the numbers of doctors and nurses and cuts in patient care in opted-out hospitals are nothing to do with him?

The Prime Minister: There are two things that I hope that the right hon. Gentleman knows about the health service—first, the vast increases that there have been in the numbers of doctors, nurses and other people in the service and, secondly, that the purpose of the reforms is to make sure that the management of the service becomes as efficient as its medical delivery.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister tell us where he thinks responsibility lies? The managers of the the Guy's and Lewisham opted-out hospitals have said that there will be

"substantial and inevitable reductions in direct patient care."

How can the Prime Minister justify turning his back on the consequences of his own policies? Does not he think that he has a moral obligation to ensure that the loss of vital patient care services at Guy's and Lewisham is not repeated anywhere else? Will he ensure that opting out is stopped right away?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman were really concerned about matters like hospital doctors, he might perhaps have looked at their pay record and have seen a real terms increase of 37 per cent. under this Government and nothing remotely like that increase under the Labour Government, for doctors' pay fell under the Labour Government.

Mr. Kinnock: Is not it clear from the Prime Minister's answers that when it comes to the national health service and patient care, he, like his predecessor, could not care less?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should know that I am personally committed to the national health service, and that I want the management of the service to be as efficient as the medical care in the service. Unless and until it is, we shall not deliver the level or amount of patient care that we need.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: If my right hon. Friend has read the latest Labour party document——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Even if he has, would the hon. and learned Gentleman please ask a question relating to the Prime Minister's responsibility?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To the extent that it is readable, will my hon. Friend endorse the fact that the poorest in the country will be poorer and the part of——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman please ask a question relating to the Prime Minister's responsibility? He may not ask the Prime Minister directly about the Opposition's policy.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. Friend, as a matter of his responsibility, having read that document, ensure that a Labour Government never return, so that the poor do not get poorer? The part of the country that would get poorest would be Scotland.

The Prime Minister: In answer to my hon. and learned Friend's direct question; willingly I will make sure that a Labour Government are never returned to power. I think that Labour's policies will be of some assistance in that, for the electorate know that it has no fresh policies and no fresh ideas and that many of its policies, like renationalisation of British Telecom, it fails to put in its policy documents.

Q2. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Archer: Will the right hon. Gentleman find time to recognise in some way that today is the anniversary of the

completion in 1821 of the first iron steamship, all the components of which were completed in one factory in the industrial black country, launching an industry which over the years offered employment to millions? Since over the past 12 months the numbers employed in manufacturing industry have fallen by 178,000, does the Prime Minister wish to remember our industrial history, or does he agree with his Secretary of State for Education and Science that history is unnecessary and perhaps better forgotten—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are taking a long time over this history lesson.

Mr. Archer: —or does he find it hard to make up his mind?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman, apart from misquoting my right hon. and learned Friend, has picked an odd day to raise that point because, as the Confederation of British Industry business agenda brochure shows, manufacturing output has just risen to new record heights, and in the last quarter of 1990 it stood 50 per cent. higher than in the first quarter of 1981.

Q3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread support for his personal vision of a first-class education for everyone? To that end, will not the promised pay review body for teachers bring better professional status for them without the strikes that have so damaged education? Does not that mean a better deal for teachers all round, for children and in the end for the prosperity of the country?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it does. I believe that the introduction of a pay review body for teachers will be warmly welcomed. The House will have noticed that at the end of a six-hour debate yesterday, no one was clear whether the Opposition were for or against the pay review body, because the National Union of Teachers had not yet told them.

Q4. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ross: Can the Prime Minister confirm that when Peter Griffiths was given the job of running the opted-out Guy's Hospital, the salary for that post was doubled to £90,000 a year, and both he and his wife were given cars? What possible justification for this scandalous misuse of public money can there be when much-needed doctors and nurses at the same hospital are facing the sack?

The Prime Minister: Peter Griffiths has the job of ensuring the adequate and proper delivery of services and he is committed to achieving that. What has so frequently damaged services in the national health service is that whenever there has been a move towards natural and necessary rationalisation, the Opposition have turned it into a political football.

Q5. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Colvin: If one man's pay rise is another man's job loss, how many jobs does my right hon. Friend think are being lost in Britain this year as a result of the astronomic pay rises which Britain's top business men awarded themselves last year? Is it not the duty of leaders to give a lead on pay restraint?

The Prime Minister: Pay must always reflect both performance and responsibility. In many countries, pay already includes a large performance element and I thoroughly welcome that. In the difficult months that we have recently seen many top managers have held or cut their pay, and that is an excellent example.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister realise that many in our country will feel pride at the role that he and Britain have played in relieving the suffering of the Kurds? However, many will have felt dismay at the complacent answer which he has just given on the African famine. Does he not realise the scale of that disaster, in which not 1 million but more than 20 million lives are now at risk? Will he assure the House and the nation that he will apply the same determination to making sure that we play our part in relieving that towering tragedy that he applied to assisting the Kurds?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his first remark. As to his latter remarks, I would remind him that this country has committed something over £4 billion to Africa in the past decade and that we invariably play a significant part in dealing with the tragedies that occasionally occur, not only in Africa but elsewhere. Even as the right hon. Gentleman asks his question, we are examining what assistance might be given to Bangladesh in the aftermath of the cyclone.

Q6. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Viggers: In the difficult international climate for business expansion and employment, is it not clear that the countries that will benefit first from a renewal of confidence will be those with flexible work practices? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the worst that could happen would be for us to adopt the statutory pay and training schemes advocated by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The greatest danger, of course, would be to adopt the Labour party's minimum wage plans which, were the right hon. Gentleman to implement them, would inflict not the 750,000 to 1 million job losses that we thought they would but between 1 million and 2 million job losses.

Q7. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evans: Has the Prime Minister had the opportunity to read early-day motion 747, which has been signed by

148 Members who are worried about the proposed takeover of the Tootal Group plc by Coats Viyella plc and the impact on jobs in the textile industry? Is he aware that 540 workers at the Tootal Slimma works in St. Helens fear that they will face the sack if that unnecessary bid succeeds? Will the right hon. Gentleman instruct the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to change his mind and refer this unnecessary bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are in no position to talk about unemployment while they hold to their minimum wage proposals.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This morning, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that he would uphold the appeal by Nirex against the refusal to grant planning permission for test boring in Caithness. As you will appreciate, this is a matter of great concern and controversy in Scotland. People are afraid that the decision will allow Nirex to go ahead with any scheme it has to build a deep depository for nuclear waste in Caithness.

In a debate last Thursday led by the Scottish Office, there was broad agreement among almost every party that contributed and among all hon. Members, whether for or against the nuclear industry, that Caithness was not a preferred option for such a scheme. In those circumstances, may I ask whether the Government have said that they will make a statement or offer an explanation about a matter that clearly will be of great interest to the people of Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: I take it that that matter arose after 12 o'clock, when I consider such matters?

Mr. Dewar: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member's comments are correct, I am sure that they will have been heard by the Government Front Benchers who are responsible for these matters?

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it concern a matter raised today?

Mr. Wallace: The point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is valid, but the Secretary of State for the Environment is ultimately responsible for Nirex and the policy which it is pursuing. Although the Secretary of State for Scotland could have denied planning permission, the Secretary of State for the Environment can clear up this matter and take away this blight from the north of Scotland if he instructs Nirex to get packing and leave Caithness.

Mr. Speaker: That is as may be, but that matter should be raised at another time.

BILLS PRESENTED

Ban of Imports (Child Labour)

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, supported by Mrs. Irene Adams, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. John Hughes, Mr. Frank Cook, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. George Galloway, Mr. Keith Vaz and Mr. Mike Watson, presented a Bill to prohibit the sale of imported goods, the manufacture of which has involved child labour: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 10 May and to be printed. [Bill 148.]

Gaming Machines (Prohibition on Use by Persons Under Eighteen)

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, supported by Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. John Hughes, Dr. John Reid, Mr. David Marshall, Mrs. Irene Adams, Mr. Thomas McAvoy, Mr. Michael J. Martin, Mr. Robert Litherland, Mr. Stanley Orme and Mr. Thomas Graham, presented a Bill to prohibit the use of gaming machines in cafeterias, small shops, amusement arcades, snack bars, fairgrounds and other places by persons under the age of eighteen: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 10 May and to be printed. [Bill 149.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must see that I am on my feet.

By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Estate Agents (Specified Offences) (No. 2) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1091) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Estate Agents (Undesirable Practices) (No. 2) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1032) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Employment Codes of Practice (Revocation) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Veterinary Surgeons Qualifications (EEC Recognition) (German Democratic Republic Qualifications) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Mr. Speaker: Now, what point of order can arise out of that matter?

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you examine the *Official Report*? When you have done so, will you instruct the Secretary of State for Defence to issue an apology to me? He gravely impugned my character. He suggested that I was in some way unpatriotic, which is not true. I was criticising the Government—not the country, not the generosity of the British people and certainly not the bravery of our troops.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with one matter at a time, please. I must say to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that I am sure that the Secretary of State would not make that allegation against any hon. Member. Many rough things are said in the Chamber. I am not responsible for answers or for questions, provided they are in order.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you would give further consideration to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I take exactly the opposite view to her on the Gulf war, but she is an hon. Member of the utmost integrity. It would be extremely unfortunate if people gained a different impression from the Secretary of State. An apology is due to her.

Mr. Speaker: I say again, rough things are said here. I am sure that what the hon. Lady has alleged will be reported to the Secretary of State for Defence, and that if he has impugned the hon. Lady's honour, he will apologise to her.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Goodness me. We have a very busy day ahead of us.

Mr. Dalyell: It is true, Mr. Speaker, that many rough things are said in this Chamber, but what is entirely new is calculated rudeness in the answers that Ministers give to questions.

Mr. Speaker: As we approach an election—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—it is probably true that the temperature rises a bit in this place. Ten-minute Bill—Mr. Banks.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Defence questions, certain questions were asked of the Secretary of State, and answered by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement, about the future of naval bases. The Prime Minister is in his place now, and has an opportunity to consider the co-ordination of policy in respect of that matter. It is extremely disturbing when Ministers make statements——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is clearly attempting a continuation of Question Time under the guise of a point of order. We cannot deal with his point now.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Did I hear you say, "As we approach an election"? If so, can you give us a date?

Mr. Speaker: It was unwise of me to express an opinion. Mr. Tony Banks.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Mine will soon be a five-minute Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order for me, or about me?

Mr. Ewing: I always try to clear up misunderstandings, Mr. Speaker. When you referred to the onset of an election, did you have in mind a general election, or the election of a new Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: They are synonymous.

Abolition of Political Honours

3.36 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I now realise, Mr. Speaker, that this might be a touchy subject.

I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to abolish political honours; and for connected purposes.

Some argue that the honours system should be abolished altogether—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Obviously a number of my colleagues have no expectation of honours to come, and agree that the honours system should be abolished lock, stock and barrel—or rather, coronet, garter and gong.

I suspect that such a proposal would not be universally popular in the House or in the country as a whole. Most people seem to agree that a country should maintain an honours system that enables the community to express its gratitude to those who have rendered a signal service. I refer to acts of bravery or heroism involving the saving of life; people who have dedicated their lives to the service of others without expectation of preferment or advantage; and those who have enhanced, beautified, or enriched our lives through their contribution to science, the arts, sport or entertainment.

Society will always want to acknowledge such contributions in some fashion, and an honours system is one way. Of course, one cannot beat decent wages and conditions, but the honours system can be an acceptable way of saying thank you. It pleases the recipient, and does not cost the rest of us an arm and a leg.

Unfortunately, the honours system has always been wholly or partially corrupt. Large numbers of those who regard themselves members of today's so-called nobility are nothing more than latter-day beneficiaries of past political, financial, or sexual favours rendered unto past kings, queens and prime ministers. The mind boggles at that latter category.

One recalls the famous quotation of the Rev. John Ball:

"When Adam dolve, and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

That puts the entire concept of class and nobility into perspective.

In the modern age, Lloyd George blew the gaff on the whole system by playing the part of the honest crook and openly selling honours. The scandal broke with the publication of the 1922 honours list and resulted in the establishment of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee in 1924 to ensure that the most obviously corrupt nominees for honours were weeded out.

That task has proved difficult for the Committee, which has enjoyed a rather patchy record since 1924. Notwithstanding all its efforts, a large number of honoured individuals have turned out to be traitors, crooks and miscreants.

At present, the noble Lords Shackleton, Pym and Grimond are doing the laundering, and they have a great problem on their hands. However, my Bill—if it were allowed to be introduced—would replace the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee with a joint Select Committee of both Houses.

The honours system undoubtedly continues to give pleasure to recipients, but there is a growing awareness among the public that the system is fixed and decidedly tacky. Indeed, the honours system might better be

[Mr. Tony Banks]

described in certain vital respects as the kickback or pay-off system. The time has come to make some fundamental and cleansing changes to the entire system.

Many of today's awards do not fall into the categories that I listed. They are not honours bestowed for conspicuous bravery or service but rather the routine gongs handed out in the civil service and military forces on the less than distinguished basis of Buggins' turn. The honours go according to rank in those services and are allocated in a ratio of honours to post holders.

There is a wide range of honours to choose from, since they consist of five degrees of the peerage; one of baronets; 14 knighthoods or orders comprising 11 different methods of securing a knighthood—28 ranks in all, excluding the two Indian and one Irish order which have now lapsed since independence, which account for another seven ranks, plus 27 medals or decorations.

The entire edifice reeks of snobbery and class division. If the Prime Minister meant what he said about a classless society, he could do a lot worse than start on the honours system and eliminate some of those preposterous awards. We know that there are class divisions galore in the civil service and the armed forces. Routine awarding of honours to those people simply reinforces and reflects that class system.

Honours given to civil servants and senior military officers as a matter of course, accompanying their not insubstantial pay and rations, are not worthy of being described as honours. Thus, the next recommendation in my Bill would be to exclude all civil servants and military personnel from receiving routine honours.

The next category of people who should normally be precluded from receiving honours are politicans—*[Interruption.]* I expected that to go down a lot worse. Since politicians and civil servants decide who is to be recommended for honours, it is no mere coincidence that so many civil servants and politicians receive honours.

In 1979, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) revised the practice of awarding party political honours. Those honours are used by party Whips and Prime Ministers as a way to exercise control. Honours are employed as an integral and important part of the patronage system, which is so debilitating of principle and integrity in politics today.

Both the right hon. Member for Finchley and her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), justified their use of party political honours on the basis that political parties were integral to the democratic process. One accepts that, but, that being so, why do we not publicly fund political parties and cease the use of the honours system as a way of rewarding time servers in this House and corporate financiers outside it?

Having said that my Bill would normally preclude honours for Members of Parliament, there must still be room for the appointment of working peers to the House of Lords while it exists in its present form—we saw the announcement that was made today.

I now come to the most venal and cynical use of the honours system—as a way of rewarding business men who give money and newspaper editors who give unstinting support to the Conservative party. That practice represents the selling of honours by any other name.

I asked the Labour Research Department—an independent body which is not connected to the Labour party—to collate the money provided by big business to the Tory party since 1979, with the honours received by the chairmen and managing directors of those same companies. I refer only to peerages and knighthoods, and where the company was mentioned in the citation. The statistics show that over £12 million was received by the Tory party from those companies. In return, their chairmen and managing directors received a total of 75 peerages and knighthoods. It works out at a going rate of around £160,000 an honour, a sum which would have pleased Maundy Gregory, Lloyd George's hawker of titles, but which is unlikely to enhance the integrity of the honours system today. My Bill would preclude anyone at board or executive level from accepting an honour if their company has made a donation to a political party, whether Conservative, Liberal Democrat or Labour, so I am being wholly impartial.

The Bill would also exclude working journalists from receiving honours. The recent honouring of the editors of the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Star* by the last Prime Minister was revolting. It was obviously their pay-off for being loyal Tory hacks. Democracy needs impartial and objective media. No self-respecting journalist should ever accept a party political honour. Politicians using the honours system to buy the media is even more dangerous than selling peerages on a street corner.

In short, the honours system has been hijacked by the party political machines, particularly that of the Tory party which shamelessly exploits the system for its own base purposes. If we are to retain an honours system, it should be based on criteria that are publicly known and approved of. It should be restricted to those persons whose services to the community are acknowledged by common consent to be worthy of reward. Excluding time-serving civil servants, politicians, brass hats, Tory business men and hack journalists would be widely welcomed in the country. I seek the leave of the House to introduce my Bill and begin the cleansing process.

3.46 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman seeking to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, I want to oppose it.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross) *rose*——*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Taylor: I hope that the House—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) has the right to oppose the Bill.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What possible point of order can arise on my having called the hon. Member for Southend, East to oppose this ten-minute Bill?

Mr. Canavan: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is quite admissible. Does not a knight take precedence over a mere commoner?

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, I need give no reasons for my decision.

Mr. Taylor: After that typical cross comment, I appeal to the House to reject this absurd Bill. I ought to say straight away that I have no personal interest whatsoever in it. Even if the Prime Minister were to offer me a political honour, my wife would stop me taking it because she is more of a democrat than I.

I want to make it abundantly clear that at this stage we must not abolish political honours. By so doing, we should abolish about the only remaining power of a British Prime Minister. Nothing would be worse for the status and morale of our revered Prime Minister and those who may follow him if we took away the one thing that he can do himself.

I shall give three examples. First, this morning in the Court of Appeal, our Sunday trading laws were effectively wrecked, on the basis of an application by some stores which said that our laws were contrary to the treaty of Rome. They won their case. Even if the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister, the Liberals and all the other political parties want Sunday trading laws, we cannot have them. The decision has been made to dump them, because of the treaty of Rome.

Secondly, we are now all talking about lotteries. We used to be opposed to lotteries, but now we find that Ministers are suddenly thinking that they are a great idea. We have to ask ourselves why. The only reason is that a case is being pursued through the courts by German lottery salesmen who say that it is illegal for us under the treaty of Rome to stop lottery tickets being sold. We know that, and the power has already gone.

Thirdly, there is the potato crisps issue. Surely, if one issue should still be for the House of Commons and the Prime Minister to decide, it is what potato crisps we can produce in Britain. This week, not because the European Parliament or our Parliament wanted it, but simply because Mr. Bangemann had had a bad breakfast, he said that certain potato crisps could not be produced in Britain.

Our glorious Prime Ministers used to make treaties and laws, and Members of Parliament thought they had some meaningful role to play in making laws, spending money and keeping control of it, so for goodness' sake let us retain for our Prime Minister the only effective power that Jacques Delors is willing to let him have—the award of political honours. Let those who want them have them, and let the Prime Minister sit down at his breakfast table and say, "Who will I give this to and who will I give that to?" Quite frankly, there is precious little that a Prime Minister can do. The House should reject the Bill, save the Prime Minister's freedom and integrity and at least let him have something still to do.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 122, Noes 90.

Division No. 131] **[3.50 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rost, Peter
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms. Diane Abbott and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

NOES

Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fox, Sir Marcus
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James

Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stokes, Sir John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Teddy Taylor and
Mrs. Teresa Gorman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Bruce Grocott, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. David Winnick, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Martin Redmond, Ms. Diane Abbott, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Dennis Skinner and Mr. Harry Cohen.

Abolition of Political Honours

Mr. Tony Banks accordingly presented a Bill to abolish political honours; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 May and to be printed. [Bill 150.]

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

[Relevant document: Second Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1990-91 on the 1991 Budget (HC289)]

4.1 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill implements the measures introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget. As background to today's debate, the House has the benefit of the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on the Budget—a thoughtful and thorough document. I am glad that so many members of the Select Committee are here for the debate. I hope that its Chairman and others will succeed in catching your eye, Mr. Speaker.

We are studying its recommendations carefully and will respond fully in due course. This is not the place to comment in detail, but perhaps I might briefly address one point made by the Committee. It was apprehensive in its report about the pace and strength of recovery. It is always difficult to forecast a turning point, but there is now accumulating evidence of one. Retail prices index inflation has fallen 2·7 points from its peak in 1990. Recent surveys show a rise in business and consumer confidence. Only this morning the CBI's quarterly trends survey showed a marked increase in optimism and output expectations. In the three months to February, private housing orders were up 12 per cent. over the previous three and exports, excluding oil and so-called erratic items, grew 2 per cent. in the year to March. That is firm evidence of the underlying strength and competitiveness of British business.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The engineering employers association for Sheffield has just published its April quarterly survey of its members. It is as contemporary as the report that the Chief Secretary is quoting in his aid. It offers no support for his view about a recovery in business confidence among engineering employers in south Yorkshire.

Mr. Mellor: If that is the case, I regret it. We can rely only on the national survey that was published today and on other evidence from which it is clear that there is a recovery of confidence. We are confident that that will lead to an increase in activity. All the business organisations have stated that the growth in the strength of so many companies in many different areas of economic activity during the 1980s means that the British economy is now far better equipped to come out of a recession than it was during the previous recession. I appreciate that that fact does not suit the Labour party's case, but it is what all the business organisations are saying and it is a matter of fundamental significance to this debate.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have noted that the chairman of the CBI said today, when commenting on the report:

"We should not underestimate the severity of the current recession and its impact on industry."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman would do well to listen to those words.

Mr. Mellor: I imagine that the hon. Gentleman is referring to a quotation from Sir Brian Corby—

Mr. Radice: From Mr. David Wigglesworth, the chairman of the CBI's economic situation committee.

Mr. Mellor: Well, the president of the CBI, Sir Brian Corby, said this very month:

"Underlying confidence in the strength of British industry and commerce is much stronger than in the early 80s—quite rightly in the light of the improvements in productivity and profitability that we have seen over the past decade . . . This is a better picture than is currently believed to be the case. Indeed, part of the problem that manufacturing industry faces in the UK today is that perceptions lag behind reality."

That is the crucial point.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I have already given way twice and so that I do not unnecessarily detain the House, I shall continue for a while and then give way.

Mr. Winnick: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way on this particular point?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is extremely persistent. I hope that he will appreciate that it will not be evasion if I do not give way so many times later in my speech, but I shall give way to him now.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to the Chief Secretary. Was he in his place during Prime Minister's Question Time when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) referred to what is happening in the black country and throughout the west midlands? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that hardly a single day goes by in my region without some news of further redundancies or closures? The west midlands fears that it will go through the same sort of thing under this Government as in the early 1980s. Will that be the case?

Mr. Mellor: I have said that many companies are passing through difficult times, but I have also said that it is undeniably true that the exports figures to the end of the first quarter of this year show an increase over the preceding year of 2 per cent. Once again, that pays tribute to the underlying strength of the economy. If, as Sir Brian Corby said, perception is lagging behind reality, some Opposition Members must take their share of responsibility for any perception of gloom, given their enthusiasm for talking down the British economy.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the recovery will very much depend on a revival of confidence and that Opposition Members who seek to talk down the economy and to pour gloom and despondency on the country are doing nothing either to aid the recovery or to further the interests of their constituents, not least their prospects of better jobs?

Mr. Mellor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. His point is even more relevant when one considers what Opposition Members would try to do if they were ever elected to Government. They would make whatever situation they inherited far worse, but I have no doubt that we shall come to that later in the debate.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I give way to my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* I have already given way to three Opposition Members. This is only the second intervention from a Conservative Member. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) will keep to that ratio in his speech.

Mr. King: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way and will seek to press the problems of the British car industry at a later stage. However, is he aware that in the first few months of this year, its production is already running at 6 per cent. more than in the first quarter of 1990, which in itself was level with the record production of 1989? In terms of exports, therefore, the British car industry is doing better than ever before.

Mr. Mellor: I was glad to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) and I was even more glad to hear the point that he made. He is exactly right. If one industry has shown more clearly than almost any other what happened to the British economy in the 1980s as opposed to the 1960s and 1970s, it is the car industry, its rebuilding and its record of export achievement. In the 1960s and 1970s, nothing exhibited more clearly the folly of the fudge and mudge of corporatism under a Labour Government than what happened to the car industry, which is now recovering.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: The blood pressure of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East would not stand my giving way to anyone else. He is always passing responsibility to others, but I shall shoulder the burden of refusing to give way to my hon. Friends. I wish to press on.

We were discussing the underlying strength of the British economy, which I assert and on which my hon. Friends agree. More significantly, hosts of business organisations also agree, notwithstanding the difficult times through which we are passing. It may be worth dwelling for a few moments more on the transformation of the British economy in recent years.

Before plunging into the thicket of detail rightly contained in the Finance Bill, we must remember how far we have come from the stagnant economy over which the previous Labour Government presided. Lest I be accused of excessive partiality and as we have already heard the Opposition cite one CBI officer, let me remind the House of a striking passage in a recent publication by the CBI which was called "Business Agenda for the 1990s". It states:

"It is all too easy to forget what the situation was like in the late 1970s. Industrial disputes, apparently regarded as inevitable, were exacerbated, if not caused by wage and price controls and over regulation. Tax avoidance and 'grantsmanship' were growth industries. Wealth was being destroyed rather than created, with negative real returns in many businesses. Investment in all its forms—new plant, innovation and skills—fell back. Britain's share of world trade was declining, seemingly inexorably. Failure was almost expected, success a surprise."

That is the CBI's comment on what happened in the 1970s and that was what we inherited.

The strength of the British economy since then has surprised many people because, despite the current recession, the past 10 years have been a success story. We have cut through the tangle of unnecessary controls which immobilised industry. We have reformed the tax regime

[Mr. Mellor]

for business and for individuals and that process is taken a stage further in the Finance Bill. Tax rates, which were punitively high under Labour, have been reduced and we have already done away completely with six taxes. We have made far-reaching changes to trade union law, while keeping a firm grip on expenditure. As a result, the nation's finances have been transformed and the budget brought back into balance, far from the days when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) might have echoed the words of President Hoover: "Blessed are the young for they shall inherit the national debt."

The results were dramatic by any standards. For eight years, the United Kingdom economy grew by an average of 3 per cent. a year.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy) *rose——*

Mr. Mellor: I shall finish this point. *[Interruption.]* I was saying that President Hoover would have lined up with the right hon. Member for Leeds, East in his addiction to the national debt and its growth and to saddling future generations with the cost of borrowing to sustain unsustainable public expenditure. The right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government in 1975 when the public sector borrowing requirement was—in today's cash terms—£60 billion. It is against that background that we might find ironic criticism of the limited PSBR that we shall be running this year.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): As the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been claiming that the Government have been successful during their period in office, will he comment on an answer given by one of his colleagues? When asked what was the annual average economic growth for 1979 to the end of 1981, the answer was 1¼ per cent. Is that a creditable record?

Mr. Mellor: In the first two years, we dealt with the recession caused by the economic mayhem of the previous Labour Government. The question that perhaps should be asked is about the position since 1982, as the benefits of our policies came into effect.

Mr. Smith: That is ridiculous.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. and learned Gentleman would say that. However, when did a Labour Government last give us eight years or even five years of sustained growth of more than 3 per cent. with investment, much of of it in productive capacity, at 80 per cent.? When did a Labour Government last give us that kind of record on productivity, output and on all the indicators in which we used to be bottom of the league during the 1970s, but in which we have been top of the league during the 1980s? When, under a Labour Government, did the British economy grow faster than the economies of the majority of the G7 countries? The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East would be hard pressed to find a precedent.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Has my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary had time to consider the latest Labour party document and the costings carried out by people in the City of the Labour party's programme showing a total of £50 billion? Are there any Treasury estimates of the level of interest rates required if the public sector borrowing requirement was increased by £50 billion a year?

Mr. Mellor: A very interesting story will be told quite soon about the cost of Labour's programme. That story will be a revelation. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) referred to Labour's policies. In their enthusiasm, for electoral or other reasons, to ditch the neo-Trotskyists of the early 1980s who dominated so much of Labour's thinking we are back—in the words of Sam Brittan upon which I cannot improve—to the soft collectivism of the 1960s and 1970s which failed under Wilson and Callaghan. That involved national assessments, interference, quangos, the things that were solemn and binding and the minimum wage. Although all those matters are probably more properly the subject for another debate, Tory Members approach them with some relish. There is precious little evidence that Labour Members can say anything about the state of the economy today that would in any way be improved by the remedies that they propose. Indeed, it is hard to think of a remedy that was not tried in the 1960s and 1970s which did not fail catastrophically.

In the 1980s the United Kingdom's GDP, investment and manufacturing productivity grew faster than that of Germany or France. Our ability to compete was restored internationally. Profitability reached a peak in the late 1980s and was at its highest level since 1973 living down the problems of the late 1970s. Combined with dramatic improvements in capital productivity, there is clear evidence of the higher quality of investments as well as of higher levels. That basic underlying strength is pulling the British economy through this recession.

I wish to consider the Bill against that background. I recall that happy phrase, "To govern is to choose." The Budget is full of wise choices. The Budget's first priority is to help businesses of all sizes both immediately and as they plan for future recovery.

Clauses 22 to 24 deal with corporation tax.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): There is a very imaginative proposal in the Budget about carrying back corporation tax from losses against profits in earlier years—from one year to three years. That is very helpful because it gives a cash injection at a time of recession. We all welcome it because it will help companies in a difficult position. Obviously my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will not be able to answer my question now. However, will he consider putting that date back further because the date of 31 March 1991 announced in the Budget would mean that the cash injection for those companies would not arrive until 1992? One needs a lifeboat when one needs it, not when the storm is over. If that date could be brought back to 31 March 1990, companies would receive the cash this year when they most need it.

Mr. Mellor: I shall certainly reflect on what my hon. Friend said, knowing that few hon. Members have more knowledge of what is happening with business, particularly small business, than he has.

I now refer to the principal clauses, 22 to 24, on corporation tax. Clause 22 cuts the main rate of corporation tax for 1990 to 34 per cent. That allows companies to keep £380 million in profits which they were expecting to pay in tax. Clause 23 goes a step further by

cutting the rate for 1991 to 33 per cent. That double cut will benefit 80,000 companies to the tune of £830 million in 1992-93. That will increase the reward to profitable investment without subsidising uneconomic investment. It represents what I hope the House will consider to be a worthy further step along a road on which we so dramatically set out in 1984 when the main rate of corporation tax was cut from 52 per cent. to 35 per cent. Of course, that gave us the lowest taxes on companies of any economy in the industrialised world. Other countries then followed our example. Now we are setting the pace again. That is a worthy point with which to start our detailed consideration of the Bill.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Chief Secretary will set the matter in context, will he not, and compare the gains from that useful measure with the £1·6 billion additional spending by business on the uniform business rate, which has gone up by an amount much higher than the actual rate of inflation?

Mr. Mellor: That is not a fair statistic. The hon. Gentleman knows that what we have done for business is to remove the vagaries of local government decision-taking that we can see in London. Perhaps it resulted in booms in business in sensibly run areas such as Wandsworth, where I have my constituency, but it left large swathes of London denuded of industrial investment. People were not prepared to invest because of the increase in business rates imposed by left-wing authorities. The hon. Gentleman will know also that, although there is a difficult transitional period—there was bound to be—the maximum increase for the business rate is tied to the rate of inflation. That is the maximum. Over the past decade, the actual increase in business rates was 40 per cent. above the rise in inflation. We know that, in 1978, in boroughs such as Ealing and Waltham Forest, rates were put up 50 per cent. overnight. That was the reason. It is worth noting that the policies of the Labour party are to give back to councils that power to raise taxes locally from business. I am sure that that point will not be lost on the business community.

Clause 24 raises profit limits for small companies and, of course, the limit for marginal relief both by 25 per cent. That will benefit about 30,000 companies. It means that the limit for small companies rate has now been raised by 150 per cent. in the past three years—a real help to small companies. Of course, as well as rewarding success and allowing companies to keep more of their profits, as my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) pointed out, we have made arrangements so that those who temporarily make a loss can recover back taxes paid in the three previous years.

It is worth noting also that all levels of business are important and that all levels of business require assistance. That is why, in clause 64, my right hon. Friend helps small firms as well as larger ones with losses by allowing unincorporated businesses to set off trading losses against capital gains, just as companies may already do. That is a help.

The total value to British industry and commerce of this package of measures relating to company taxes is £1·1 billion next year—money that can be used for productive investment. Of course, we have gone beyond that and made other efforts to change the way in which the tax system works when those in business who have to operate it told us ways in which it could work better.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): In directing his attention not only to small companies that need assistance but to large companies, will my right hon. and learned Friend include building societies? If that is the case, will he be prepared to look again at clause 50? People are saying to me and, I suspect, to other hon. Members that that clause is a vehicle not only for retrospective legislation but for double taxation. As this stems from a court victory by one building society, would not it be extremely unfair that it should result in the Government's gaining about £250 million in taxation? That would represent a reduction in the capacity of the building societies to lend, just at a time when we hope that the housing market is beginning to prosper again, and it would have an adverse effect on investment.

Mr. Mellor: As the immortal Jim Hacker would have said, I am glad that my hon. Friend asked me that question. It gives me an opportunity to deal with a point that is giving rise to concern among a number of hon. Members. I shall deal with clause 50 as thoroughly as I can. As my hon. Friend knows, the Finance Act 1985 made changes in the manner in which building societies pay tax on the interest paid to their investors. Previously those money had been rendered up in one lump sum on 1 January each year. The change meant that, from the tax year beginning in April 1986, those moneys had to be rendered up quarterly, as had been done for some time in the case of banks and other financial institutions.

Regulations to deal with a problem that was very openly signposted at that time were laid before the House. Building societies have different year ends, and we needed to cover the period between the end of their 1985-86 year and the beginning of April 1986, when the new arrangements were to come into force. The regulations charged building societies at the 1985-86 rate of tax. One case went all the way to the House of Lords, which determined that, while it was lawful for the Government to make arrangements for those moneys to be liable to tax, it was ultra vires that we should apply, by way of the regulations, the rate that prevailed in 1985-86. It was only right that tax should be rendered up on moneys withheld from interest payments to investors. The court's determination was that it was lawful—of course, it must be—for tax to be paid, but not lawful for a rate to be applied. That is the present position.

The Bill will put us in the situation in which we understood ourselves to be before the House of Lords gave its judgment, and will apply the 1985-86 tax rate. Without it, a number of building societies would make windfall profits, as the moneys that they had withheld—perfectly properly—from interest payments to their depositors would not then be liable to be rendered up. The moneys would not go to depositors. There is no question of double taxation; the issue is whether there should be taxation at all. The amount involved is £250 million. This is the basis of clause 50.

Sir Robert McCrindle: I followed with great interest the technical explanation that my right hon. and learned Friend offered, and I accept at least a goodly part of it. Irrespective of the position for investors, it is extremely difficult to deny that if this £250 million ends up under

[Sir Robert McCrindle]

Government control, money that would have been available for future mortgages, at a time when, we hope, the housing market is beginning to move, will be in the coffers not of the building society but of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Mellor: With great respect to my hon. Friend, whose return to vigour and effectiveness in the House all of his hon. Friends welcome so much—I say that genuinely as someone who has admired and respected him throughout my time in Parliament—I cannot agree with his point. The money was interest due to depositors with building societies. If it were not for the fact that there was a tax liability, all that money would have had to be paid to investors. Moneys were withheld on the basis that they would have to be rendered up to the tax authorities. But for the fact that a change was made from annual to quarterly payment, those moneys would have been paid to the Government without argument.

In making the change, there was a transitional period for which we thought provision had been made, between the end of the financial year of the building society through to the beginning of the financial year in which the new arrangement would come into effect, in which the tax rates prevailing for 1985-86 would apply. The only consequence of no tax being applied would be that moneys had been deducted by building societies from interest properly due to their investors which, because they were not rendered up to the taxation authorities, would go, in my judgment quite undeservedly, into the coffers of the building societies themselves. That is the position. All that we are doing is restoring the position to what everyone understood it to be until it was subject to legal challenge.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will give way once more. The fact that so many hon. Members want to make points is precisely the reason why we have a Committee stage, which will give hon. Members a chance to explore the matter further.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I try to help my right hon. and learned Friend? Is not the position that the money which was withheld from depositors would have been paid in tax in a subsequent year because the tax to be paid in the actual year had already been paid? Is not it also the position that people who had mortgages with the Woolwich or who had lent money to the Woolwich—I do both—have got their £90 million, and that all other building societies have been treated differently? Was it not the House of Lords' judgment that it was retrospective and double taxation, which the House had authorised, without knowing that it had done so? Would not it be better for the Government to think again and drop clause 50?

Mr. Mellor: Plainly there will be plenty of opportunity in Committee to explore the matter. The position is that but for the action which the Government are taking, no tax whatsoever would be levied on a substantial sum that fell due between the end of the financial year 1985-86—whatever month that was for the building society concerned—and 6 April 1986. I take the view that that would not be acceptable. I am sorry if it is held against us, but we are expecting the normal rules of the game in regard to the Woolwich. If the Revenue loses a case, it does not seek to take back from the litigant the benefit that has been gained. When one is dealing with £250 million, which, but for this, should have been in the pockets of depositors, there is no reason why other building societies should gain the benefit.

I appreciate that others take a different view on the matter. One reason for Committee stages is that people apart from me will be able to justify the policy in Committee. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, a man of infinite resource, is ready and available, as is the Economic Secretary. They will be willing to entertain the Standing Committee at whatever hour of the night appears appropriate to deal with the matter.

I shall deal briefly with some other major points in the Budget. VAT relief on bad debts was widely welcomed when the scheme came into operation in April. It is worth noting that clause 14 will halve the waiting period to one year. That will boost cash flow by some £340 million—a vital way to help growing firms on whom the burden of bad debt can be particularly heavy.

On the serious misdeclaration penalty, clause 17 responds to widespread representations about the VAT penalty regime. I hope that it shows the value to the House of the detailed representations that hon. Members make on behalf of the business community.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): May I suggest to my right hon. and learned Friend, and indeed to the Financial Secretary, that there is likely to be a good deal more bad debt in VAT if nothing is done to help the racing industry? Will he, in the course of this Finance Bill, perhaps in Committee, give the Minister of State an opportunity to report to the House on how she is getting on in her search for a solution to a problem that is seriously damaging an important industry?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend the Minister of State will meet representatives of the industry next week to discuss this very point. I understand that it is because the great town of Newmarket is within my hon. Friend's constituency that he speaks as he does.

I am anxious not to detain the House for too long, so I shall pass over a number of items in the Bill to which I might otherwise have drawn attention.

On vocational training relief, I think that it has been widely welcomed that those who wish to improve themselves by financing training out of their own pockets will now get tax relief for it. I believe that that is a help to the work force.

I should just pause over the policy for the family which is furthered in this Budget. Although business was the central theme of the Budget, my right hon. Friend made room for measures to benefit families. The rise in child benefit is already well known and I need say no more about it. It deals with an issue that has caused a great deal of interest in the House in recent years. I hope that this sets us on a course which the whole House will appreciate as being wise and necessary.

There are also, of course, measures for the elderly. Clause 21 provides for the married couple's allowance generally to be unchanged, but the normal indexation provisions will continue to apply to the married couple's allowance for the elderly. For a couple over 75 the increase this year could be worth up to £4·47 a week.

With regard to health and the environment, I am personally pleased that in the Budget we recognise the

need to make further substantial increases in the taxes on tobacco. Clause 2 raises the duty on tobacco products by 15 per cent. That puts an extra 16p on a packet of 20 king-size cigarettes—in itself the biggest cash increase in taxes on tobacco since 1981. This, with the VAT increase, makes the total additional tax burden on 20 cigarettes about 22p. I believe that in raising the real level of total taxes on tobacco to the highest since the mid-1960s we have done the right thing for the future health of the nation.

The duties on alcohol are increased in line with inflation. There are changes in clause 6 to the way in which we tax beer. The new system will be simpler and fairer, because the duty will be related more precisely than it is at present to alcoholic strength, so some strong beers and lagers will bear more duty. I believe that that is right, and anyone who is concerned about the problems of lager louts, particularly the extent to which strong lagers have come into fashion among youngsters today, might think that this a step in the right direction which is capable of being built on in the future.

On the environment, this was not the year to burden industry with a tax on carbon. It was certainly not the year for the Government to strike out or take unilateral action to put our businesses at a competitive disadvantage. Nor, I thought, was it the year to introduce new complexities, such as different rates of car tax, graduated vehicle excise duty, and so on. But we have put up the cost of car use in what I believe is an acceptable way but which nevertheless leans in the direction of a policy that deals with some of the problems of pollution. The increase in fuel duties offers all of us a choice: pay more and forget about it, or think more carefully about our use of vehicles and cut costs. Of course, it adds to the incentive to buy a more fuel-efficient car, which I think is a responsible stance for us to take.

One of the successes of the use of tax incentives to environmental ends has been the growth in the use of unleaded petrol. Four years ago the share of unleaded petrol in the United Kingdom market was negligible. A gallon of unleaded cost more than a gallon of leaded.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) introduced a tax differential to offset the cost disadvantage. Then he widened it to give motorists a positive incentive to convert to unleaded fuel. In last year's Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor widened it still further. Now, just a few years later, unleaded takes 39 per cent. of the market. This year's proposal will widen the tax differential again. It now stands at 4p a litre.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Bearing in mind my right hon. and learned Friend's comments about unleaded petrol, does he believe that there should be a move in the direction of diesel, which is also environmentally friendly, and that we should encourage its use as much as possible?

Mr. Mellor: We always consider such issues at the time of the Budget. I know that my hon. Friend appreciates that others argue against that approach, but I shall certainly have regard to his points.

I should not end my comments on the Budget's effects on families without mentioning the relief that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor gave community charge payers. We have already enacted legislation to give effect to that. There cannot be a free lunch. The Bill implements the other parts of the switch from local to central Government taxation. Clause 12 raises the rate of VAT to 17·5 per cent. In the circumstances in which we found ourselves, that was an appropriate step to take.

VAT is a proportionate tax—the more we spend, the more we pay. Our zero-rated range is wider than that of any other European Community country. When we buy zero-rated items, we pay no tax. On average, half our spending on goods and services is on zero-rated items. Those are weighted heavily towards the necessities of life. I cannot improve on the comment in *The Guardian* after the Budget:

"Using VAT to pay for the reduction in the poll tax was thus a broadly progressive measure."

On that occasion at least, *The Guardian* was right.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: With respect, I have given way a lot. I have probably more than outstayed my welcome and I must conclude. If one gives way, one always faces the danger that people will say, "He spoke for far too long."

Mr. John Smith: No, carry on.

Mr. Mellor: I wish to draw attention to two points. Despite the injunction of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East for me to carry on, I shall resist temptation. On fairness, clause 26, which limits mortgage interest relief to the basic rate of tax, means that the same mortgage now receives the same relief, irrespective of the home buyer's income. That is fair. It has been compensated for in clause 20 by raising the basic rate limit to take account of most of it.

I am grateful to those in the press who drew attention to the problems of non-resident trusts. We have devised an effective way of dealing with them so that they cannot be used unfairly to avoid tax. That provision is made in clauses 71 to 80.

Fairness, families and business were the themes of the Budget introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. They are faithfully given effect to in the Finance Bill. I hope that we can briefly discuss any problems in Committee. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.43 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): For the past year or more, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have spent a great deal of time not just talking to people in industry and commerce but listening to them speak about the specific measures that they argue would promote success. One of the most noticeable features, especially in the past few months, is that, as those conversations develop, certain questions keep emerging—questions which came into my mind when I listened to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

I find that I am continually being asked, "Do the Government really believe what they are saying about the state of the economy? If they do, why do they believe it? If they do not, why do they keep saying it?" I can answer the last question. It is clear that the Government keep saying it because they hope that, if they do, someone else will believe it. It appears from the Finance Bill that perhaps the Government believe what they are saying—that there is little need for action by them.

The Government claimed in grandiose terms that this was a Budget for business. However, the Institute of Fiscal Studies and one of the advisers to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee suggested that that was

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

overstating the consequences for business. S. G. Warburg said that it was difficult to find a list of positives for business in the Budget, although it had no difficulty finding a list of negatives.

The measures in the Budget that alleviate business costs through the reduction in the rate of corporation tax are almost offset by the introduction of national insurance contributions on company cars. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, those measures must be set against the decision to increase the business rate by 10·9 per cent., the decision to increase business costs by reducing the share of statutory sick pay that the Government are prepared to fund—quite apart from the administrative charges incurred—and the charges on mobile telephones, which the Chief Secretary did not mention.

We welcome some of the help that is given in the Finance Bill to small businesses. We particularly welcome the bad debt provisions, which we proposed in the debate on last year's Finance Bill, and the measures that include some movement to deal with the loophole involving offshore trusts. We give a whole-hearted welcome to the ending of the freeze on child benefit, even if we have reservations about the way in which the Government have done that. We welcome these and other measures for which we called either in debates on previous Finance Bills or in our proposals.

We note the rejection of the argument, widely made by industry, that the most effective help for investment would have been to improve investment allowances. We note also —the Chief Secretary touched on this point—the minuscule help given in the Budget for training. That is particularly astonishing if both those measures are set against the considerable and continuing cuts in Government support for industry and training in this year of recession.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Would not the Labour party's proposal to put a payroll tax of £1·25 billion on industry to help pay for training be disastrous at a time when employers are trying to reduce costs?

Mrs. Beckett: As we have no such proposal, I do not propose to dwell on that intervention. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) may be referring to another proposal—that those who do not train at all and make no contribution, other than to poach on those who train, would have to contribute through training or through a contribution to a training fund. That is eminently sensible. Competitor countries have similar policies, which they have no difficulty in policing. We believe that that proposal will strengthen training and the position of the many people, to whom clearly the Government did not listen, who desperately resent the fact that while they invest in training, their competitors poach from them. The evidence of the Bill, and what it would do, must be examined in the context of what the Government say about the state of the economy.

At long last, the Government have been forced, by a rising tide of incredulity, to admit that we are in recession, although they continue to claim that this recession will not be as bad as their last one in the early 1980s. They argue that not only we but many other countries are in recession and that our recession is caused by the problems of excessive success, and we are on the way towards recovery. I believe that yesterday the Chancellor said that recovery was "around the corner".

The argument about recession being caused by the problems of success is particularly hard to follow, especially as the Government contend that other countries are in a recession that is not as deep as ours. They argue that we have had such wild success that we found ourselves in recession and that other countries are in not as bad a recession because they have not been as successful as us. That is a peculiar argument, even for the Government. As to recovery being "around the corner", I share the view recently expressed by chambers of commerce that the Government were "over-optimistic" in their belief that inflation has been beaten and that the end to the recession is in sight. The Chief Secretary today made the same comment about cumulative evidence. I refer him to a Greenwell Montagu bulletin that states that it can find

"few convincing signs that the recovery has yet begun."

The Chief Secretary said that many organisations had claimed otherwise. Perhaps whichever Minister winds up will identify them.

In an address recently to the Institute of Directors, the Chancellor of the Exchequer drew attention—this was very honest of him—to his 12 years' continuous service in Government, five of them as a Treasury Minister. It is a welcome change for a member of the Government to admit some responsibility for the state of the economy. He also made interesting remarks about the difficulty of forecasting when recovery will come. He spoke of his sceptical attitude towards forecasts, and, with his experience, who can blame him? However, he admitted to having a lot of respect for data, and made particular reference to surveys of business and consumer attitudes.

It may have struck the Chancellor that there was a problem with that observation, and that perhaps he had launched yet another boomerang, because he hastily added that such surveys and data must be carefully interpreted. Although I read the Chancellor's speech with care, it was difficult to make out the points that he was trying to convey, but I will attempt to summarise them. The Chancellor said:

"Lagging indicators will go on signalling recession when the economy has begun to recover . . . Once these points are understood, it is possible to reconcile the notion that recovery is on the way with a continuing flow of gloomy statistics."

He went on to comment on unemployment. It is increasingly clear that the Chancellor is arguing that forecasts are okay as long as they are favourable, but not if they are gloomy, and that the same is true of results. Apparently, therefore, we should ignore unemployment figures, but believe forecasts of recovery.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer decided yet again to fiddle with our inflationary expectations by making changes to value added tax. Only a few short weeks ago, Ministers stood at the Dispatch Box, one after the other, to tell the House that what mattered was not the headline rate of inflation but the underlying rate, leaving out mortgages and the poll tax. Now the Chancellor argues that the underlying rate is "utterly meaningless". Under pressure, he promised—in Committee, I believe—to take the underlying rate into account, along with a range of other indicators. But if he thinks that the underlying rate is fairly meaningless, it is also fairly meaningless for him to say that he will take it into account. He means that he will

ignore it because it might reveal the risks that he has been running with the underlying rate of inflation while talking loudly about his great concern for it.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does the hon. Lady deny that unemployment is a lagging indicator, that it increases after falls in output, and that increases or reductions in unemployment follow, but do not precede, a revival in output?

Mrs. Beckett: There is something in what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not recall him making the same point in 1979, when unemployment stood at 1 million. Today, the figure is 2 million, even after 30 changes to the way in which it is calculated. Nor did the hon. Gentleman make that comment when unemployment was falling.

The Chancellor wants to assume that Britain is enjoying a recovery, no matter what the indicators suggest. He cites unemployment precisely because he expects it to go on rising, but for how long? Perhaps the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) can tell the House. Will unemployment continue to increase for a year, or longer? It will certainly rise for some time to come, and at considerable cost to many of our constituents.

The Government's partial, self-selection of statistics created the problem in the first place. Just before the Budget, an economist with S.G. Warburg Securities, commenting on Government statistics produced at the time, said that the economy was

"much weaker than the Government thought at the time".

That cast doubt on the policy of keeping interest rates so high for so long. Another indicator of the economy is the 70 per cent. increase in business failures in the first quarter of this year, which is the highest level for many years. Unemployment has shown a cumulative rise of almost half a million over the past year, and the figure for last month was the highest since the second world war. The Government will not listen to any point of view that they do not share. In the words of the song, they are not listening still; perhaps they never will.

Whatever the Government choose to hear, the people of this country have a right to learn some of the alarming evidence that Ministers discount. A recent analysis by Midland Montagu contrasted the comparisons that are continually being made between the current recession and that of the early 1980s. The actual results, which the Chancellor prefers, that are contributing to the developing economic pattern parallel exactly the downturn of the early 1980s. Sadly, the improvement is all in the forecasts. Perhaps it was after examining the same evidence that the chambers of commerce made their comment about the Government being over-optimistic, said that they do not expect a recovery until 1992, and warned that Britain is in a "deep recession" that no amount of talking will lead us out of.

The Engineering Employers Federation drew attention to the increased investment in manufacturing needed for a sustainable recovery, and to the requirement for a higher level of skills in the existing work force and among potential recruits. The federation asserts that, even in a recession, skills shortages are a matter of continuing concern.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Lady accept that if there is to be industrial investment, there must be savers whose money can be made available for such investment? If so, is it not curious that Labour proposes a tax on savings?

Mrs. Beckett: Our proposal is only to treat unearned income in the same way as earned income, which seems a fair change. Our intention is to impose a 9 per cent. charge, equivalent to that made in respect of national insurance contributions. For that reason, it will not be applied to the incomes of those who have retired—to pensioners.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): I well understand the difference between earned income and unearned income—*[Laughter.]* I understand that the 9 per cent. charge will apply to salaried persons, but will someone who is well over the existing £3,000 on investment limit and earning a large salary also have to pay 9 per cent. on any excess income?

Mrs. Beckett: Indeed. On income from investments of about £30,000—which would result in income that exceeded £3,000—they would pay a charge of 9 per cent. on the extra income in just the same way as someone who earns that extra money would pay that charge. However, that does not arise from the case that I seek to make in this debate and so, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall not pursue it. The position is quite clear.

Sir William Clark: Does that mean that the highest rate of tax that can be levied on an individual is not 59 per cent. but 68 per cent. if that person has additional investment income?

Mrs. Beckett: That is ingenious, but no.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman as I have already given way once to him.

Like the chambers of commerce, the Engineering Employers Federation suggests that there is unlikely to be any real recovery until at least mid-1992. The CBI's forecast some little time ago, with which I think that all the House is familiar, of a fall in investment of about 16 per cent., would take the level of manufacturing investment below the level that the Government inherited in 1979. Despite the background of the Government's claims for the economy, the Treasury Select Committee expressed the view that

"adverse international factors have been relatively unimportant in"

shaping the recession. The Governor of the Bank of England said in evidence to the Committee that the recession is "somewhat homegrown". Whatever the Prime Minister may argue, the Chancellor said in evidence to the Select Committee that there is not a worldwide recession as there was the first time round.

Against the background of those comments, I shall examine some of the evidence that those learned commentators may well have had in mind, especially since the Chancellor said in his speech to the Institute of Directors that we need to see our current difficulties in the context of what has been achieved since 1979—a view with which I whole-heartedly agree.

The Government make many extravagant claims for the growth that has been enjoyed in the 1980s, as if peak growth were enjoyed in every year of that decade. However, a quick canter through the results—the Chancellor has told us that he gives great credence to results—of what happened between 1979 and 1991 does not give quite the picture that the Government paint,

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especially if their claim is that Britain had a better performance in the 1980s relative to that of our competitors, which is what they said the other day.

Let us consider the rate of growth of gross domestic product per head between 1979 and 1991. In the European big four—Italy, Germany, France and the United Kingdom—we came fourth; in the Group of Seven, we came seventh; in the European Community 12, we came 10th, as we beat the Netherlands and Greece; in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in Europe, we came 16 out of 19; and in the OECD 24, we came 20th, and this time we managed to beat Iceland and New Zealand as well as the Netherlands and Greece. So much for our claims to startling relative success in the 1980s, during which—as the Economic Secretary admitted the other day—our growth rate was below the rate that we enjoyed in the much-abused 1970s, when we lacked the advantage of North sea oil.

Let us look a little nearer to the present day—at last year's results and at the signs of recession, although I think that the Prime Minister would prefer to call it weakening activity. There are some signs of recession in other English-speaking economies—in the United States, Canada and Australia—but not among our colleagues in the European Community, with whom we have to compete most directly after 1992. There are increasing signs of unemployment among those other economies but not among those with whom we must compete directly in Europe. In 1990, Britain had the slowest growth in GDP of all the OECD countries except Iceland. That shows our success in that decade and in the last year for which we have figures.

However, there must be something in the Government's optimism. I decided that I had better turn to the forecasts because the Chancellor said that sometimes it was all right to look at forecasts. Midland Montagu point out that the forecasts for 1991 which were given in the Budget

"represent a complete reversal of those given only four months ago in the Autumn Statement."

The Budget Red Book shows a fall in total investment and the Government usually prefer that figure to the figure for manufacturing investment.

In terms of total investment, the Red Book shows the largest year-on-year decline in total investment in the economy since the year of the great depression in 1931-32—which is as revealing as it is alarming. That takes account of the measures in the Budget which are supposed to have done so much to improve our position.

The forecast shows that we shall have the slowest growth in GDP in 1991 of all OECD countries and the greatest decline in business investment, to which the Government are normally so wedded, in the OECD. The International Monetary Fund forecasts that the United Kingdom will have the lowest growth of all G7 economies for 1989, 1990 and 1991 and that, along with Canada, we are forecast to have a decline in growth in 1991.

What is especially worrying is that, apart from that forecast of decline in investment in the Red Book—10 per cent., which is bad enough—the results so far, taking the year from the first half of 1990 to the first half of 1991, are greater than the Red Book forecast, at more than 12 per cent.

That brings me to today's survey results from the CBI, to which the Chief Secretary referred. *[Interruption.]* I am not surprised that Treasury Ministers do not want to listen; I would not want to if I were them. Let us set the CBI's survey results in context. There is a slight increase in optimism. In other words, people are not quite as pessimistic as they were in January. That might have a little to do with the Gulf war, but let us be generous and say that it is all to do with the signs of recovery that the Government detect. Whatever the levels of overall optimism, the survey shows that indications for investment, training, innovation and employment are still deeply alarming. Expectations for investment are worse than they were when the last survey was published in January. Expectations for training and innovation are no better than they were when the last survey was published—in other words, a continuing, although not worsening, decline in investment in training and innovation is expected. The expectations of unemployment are worse than they were in January. Orders and industrial output are expected to fall.

In that context, it is especially alarming to note that the CBI tells us that the survey in January, although it was bad, understated the case and was too optimistic compared to the fall in orders that took place. No wonder that the CBI says—whatever the Chief Secretary says—that although the trend in output appears to be levelling out it is

"too early to speak of recovery"

and it will take a long time

"to recover this lost ground."

That is what the Chief Secretary called firm evidence of a recovery. Let me remind the House that these are forecasts. Somewhere in all these figures for outturn, figures for results and the figures that I have just given for a variety of people's forecasts, the Government are finding the source of optimism that they so repeatedly preach to us all in the House.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): They make it up.

Mrs. Beckett: I think that my hon. Friend is right.

It is hard to see what, other than a desperate attempt to obscure responsibility for the recession, fuels the optimism to which the Government lay claim. Since they admitted the existence of recession, late and grudgingly, they have been saying that it is nearly over. I shall consider the pattern of the Government's observations—one might call it the seven ages of a Treasury Minister.

First, the Government said that there was no recession and they got very shirty with people who said that there was, claiming that they were trying to talk us into one. That was the first stage, although the Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor, said that things would not be easy. In the second stage the Government began to admit to a weakening of activity around the time of the autumn statement. The third stage was when they admitted that the recession had arrived but that they hoped that it would be, in the Chancellor's words, "shallow and short-lived." The fourth stage came with the recent admissions that the recession has turned out to be deeper than the Government thought. I regard it as the fifth stage that the Prime Minister identifies the fact that other people are on their way into recession because they have not been as successful as we have for as long as we have, so they were not so lucky as we were to get into the recession as fast as

we did. That bears no relation to any facts that I can discover. The sixth stage is that recovery is "around the corner", as the Chancellor says.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee says that it detects at present

"the absence of any firm evidence that recovery is taking place."

It is also concerned that recovery is so heavily dependent upon a revival of consumer confidence and consumer expenditure, which may falter if unemployment continues to rise. That is borne out by other comments. Midland Montagu says that the onus of proof lies on those who see signs of recovery and that the prime risk is on the other side. There is also a seventh stage, the other side of the hurricane—all the winds diminished, blissful calm beginning to appear but, on the other side of the eye, the winds beginning to rise again.

I have no doubt that the forecasts that the Government would most prefer to discount are those that suggest that after a time, with inflation low and interest rates lower than they have been, once the recovery is under way the balance of payments deficit will begin to deteriorate, inflation may well begin to deteriorate and pressure will come on interest rates again. The tragedy of all this is that even the recovery that the Government suggest, delicate though it is, is not a recovery led by investment or exports. The danger is that that recovery may well be shallow and short-lived, as the balance of payments constraint re-emerges.

Perhaps the most revealing as well as the most notable aspect of the Budget was the decision to raise between £4·5 billion and £5 billion through the increase in value added tax—revealing because it was a decision that had nothing whatever to do with long-term planning for the structure of local government, and nothing to do with long-term planning about what the balance should be between the moneys raised from local resources and from central Government, but everything to do with the timing of the election and the Government's desperate need to defuse the unpopularity of the poll tax. Between £4·5 billion and £5 billion is to be raised by means of this surcharge, but there will not be a single teacher, home help, cleaner or caretaker to show for it. On the debit side, yet again there is the risk of more inflationary own goals.

With this Finance Bill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is treading water. The only suggestion in the Bill that there is a long-term strategy behind what the Government are doing is their choice, when they decided to give some help to business, to focus on the rate of corporation tax rather than on allowances of one sort or another. It highlights the long-term direction set out by the Chancellor in his speech to the Adam Smith Institute—the long-term direction called for by bodies such as the Institute of Directors, which asked for cuts in the rate of taxes in order gradually to erode and allow for the disappearance of the welfare state. In that speech the Chancellor said:

"The need to reduce the size of the public sector remains at the top of the Government's agenda. It is only by keeping spending under control that we will be able to deliver the income tax cuts to which we are committed."

Yet again I am pleased to see that Conservative Members share that view whole-heartedly, and yet again, as throughout the Government's period in office, we see their determination to use the resources that become available to cut the rate of income tax, although that distributes resources most heavily to those who need them least. I am mindful that the cumulative cuts that the Government have made in income tax mean that someone whose earnings amount to £70,000 a year has made £34,000 out of those cumulative income tax changes.

The pursuance of that policy and the increases in VAT and national insurance contributions have already led to an increase during this Government's period in office in the overall tax burden for an average family, with one wage earner and two children. The income tax cuts that they have made have been almost outweighed to a penny—certainly to a couple of pounds—by the increases in national insurance contributions and the effect of the freezing of child benefit. On top of that, we have had not only the increase in VAT but also the poll tax.

The Finance Bill will not do a great deal of harm, but it will not do much good, either. During the past few years, our economy has fallen into the hands of a group of joyriders. Like most joyriders, they grew more and more reckless as time went on and, as the excitement mounted, more and more convinced of their own skill and infallibility. Like so many joyriders, they have ended up in the ditch. Some of the casualties will never be the same again.

It is evident, from both the Budget and the Finance Bill, that to us will fall the task of getting the vehicle out of the ditch and back on the road. That job will have to be done before we can even assess the full extent of the damage. The Finance Bill shows that it will not be done by this Government. The sooner they move out of the driving seat and let us get on with the job, the better.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. A great many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so brief speeches would be very much appreciated.

5.15 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Following the speech of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) one thing has been made quite clear—that the Labour party's top rate of tax would not exceed 59 per cent. for any individual. I am delighted that she confirmed that fact.

This was a good Budget. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary was right to draw attention to the fact that, during the last few months, interest rates have come down from 15 to 12 per cent. Some of the forecasts—whether from the Confederation of British Industry or the various chambers of commerce—have overdone it. I do not know whether that was in an effort to stampede my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer into a precipitate reduction of interest rates. I am absolutely convinced that he is right to take the reduction of interest rates step by step and to do nothing drastic, which would set off a consumer boom and put us back to square one. The CBI has said today that the recession is flattening out. I agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that, after the second quarter of this year, we shall probably come out of it. Come the autumn and next year, the economy will be in very good shape.

Before I come to the points that I really want to make, there is one small question that I ought to raise. At the moment, farmers are having a fairly hard time. I cannot understand why the vehicle excise duty on tractors has been increased from £16 to £30. That increase is mistimed for the farming industry.

[Sir William Clark]

In an otherwise excellent Finance Bill, I believe that clause 29 is petty. I do not know whether my colleagues on the Treasury Bench realise that mobile telephones are now a business tool. Particularly those people who work away from head office find that they are essential. I am the chairman of a company that insists that those of its employees who do not work at head office should have a mobile telephone so that we can get hold of them.

I was encouraged by the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he opened a factory in Worksop the week before last. Somebody tackled him about the value of mobile telephones. My right hon. Friend turned round to him and said, "I couldn't do my business without them." He is not alone. A lot of people in business need a mobile telephone, so this clause is very petty. It will produce £10 million, yet one is talking about a Budget amounting to well over £200 billion.

We are playing around with a business tool. Let us not forget that the United Kingdom leads the world in mobile communications. It would be wrong to tax it. If the employee repays the employer for any private use of the mobile telephone, the employee becomes exempt from the tax. How will employers check on how many private telephone calls have been made on a mobile telephone? If that is the logic used by the Government, why are they stopping there? Why not surcharge private calls made by people who work at desks? I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will look again at the tax, because it really is nonsense.

If it were a matter of saving face, we could introduce self-certification. We have introduced it for the taxation of married couples. One's wife can certify that she is not liable to tax, and consequently the bank or building society must pay her interest gross. We have a precedent, so an employee could certify that he or she did not use the mobile telephone for more than 1 per cent. of phone calls.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Having read the clause dealing with mobile telephones, it is not clear that avoidance of the charge will be the easiest thing in the world, and does that not make it likely that £10 million could be an overestimate of the revenue to be raised?

Sir William Clark: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Although the Exchequer might raise £10 million in revenue, the tax puts a burden on business by making it necessary to check whether an employee is using a mobile telephone for private calls. If we must tax mobile telephones, we might as well tax private calls made by people who work at desks.

I was interested in the exchanges between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle). The Government must look again at clause 50. Despite the Government's statements, there is no question but that it is double taxation. If one has paid one's assessment for 1985-86, no more tax is payable for that year. However, more tax could be paid depending on the accounting date of the building society. If the building society's accounting year ends on 31 March, there is no tax to be paid, but if it ends on 30 September, tax would be charged not only on the full year 1985-86 but on another six months' interest. If the building society accounting year ended in May, there would be considerable extra tax to pay.

I have nothing to do with the Woolwich, but that building society won its case in the High Court in July 1986. The case went to the Court of Appeal in April 1988, and the Woolwich lost. Last October, the case was taken to the House of Lords, and the Woolwich won. If my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench cannot convince the highest court in the land that there is anything wrong, why was the Woolwich repaid £44 million? The money was repaid simply because the Law Lords said that it was double taxation and therefore should be repaid. An example of the anomalies and unfairnesses concerns the Leeds building society. Again I stress that I have no connection whatsoever with the Leeds. The Leeds and the Woolwich were working in harness, although the Woolwich brought the test case. Any lawyers in the House will know that, when there is a test case, anyone in similar circumstances benefits from that judgment. The Woolwich was repaid £44 million, but the Leeds remains £57 million out of pocket. That must be wrong, and the Government must look again at the matter.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary said that it would be a windfall for the building society but would not affect its members. I should have thought that, if the Leeds building society were to receive £57 million tomorrow, that money would go into its reserves. Those reserves do not stand idle; they are invested. All the money in a building society belongs to the 30 million investors, so there is no difference between the building society and the investors; they are one and the same, and all the money belongs to them.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I agree with virtually everything that my hon. Friend has said, but he should make it clear that the House of Lords said that the subsequent regulations allowed for retrospection and therefore legalised the double taxation. The relief to the Woolwich turned on the rate of taxation, but the real issue is that Parliament did not expect to be imposing double taxation, yet the House of Lords said that it was double taxation. That is why the House of Commons has a rightful grumble, and that is why we want Treasury Ministers to think again.

Sir William Clark: I remind the House that counsel for the Government said in the House of Lords:

"Even if this amendment does impose double taxation, that is nothing to do with you because Parliament has willed it."

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is quite right. Parliament willed it, but it did so on the understanding that there was no double taxation. That is why we must go back and think again.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that, when the Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986 that were made under the 1985 Finance Act were challenged by the Woolwich building society, the Government introduced a new clause at the Report stage of the 1986 Finance Bill. The matter was fully discussed and the Government said that it was not intended that there should be double taxation. The House of Lords has now found that Parliament approved double taxation by

agreeing to that new clause, so we approved something that we understood would not arise. That is the cause of the present difficulties.

Sir William Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point so clearly.

The philosophy of the Conservative party has always been against retrospection. It is a one-off case, so it cannot be said that we thought the law applied in a certain way and we are now putting it right. Since the House of Lords said that the Woolwich must get its money back, I am absolutely certain that the Leeds and every other building society will do the same. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary will realise that I am not in favour of wasting Exchequer money, but when unfairness has cost £250 million, we must do something about it.

I regret this note of discord, but we should not be petty about mobile telephones or abandon the Conservative party's anathema to retrospective legislation. We have a strong economy and we must do all that we can to help businesses, both small and large, but we must always be fair to the taxpayer.

5.30 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) spoke about mobile telephones. It is rare that I agree with the right hon. Gentleman, but he made an important point. It will be a difficult tax to collect and, as one can see from reading the clause, it will be easy to avoid.

The Treasury and Civil Service Committee has again produced its report, and the House is grateful. I have just one comment on the unanimity of the Committee, which I welcome. The Committee can be powerful or influential only when it looks at the facts and comes to a decision based upon them. I am pleased to see that it has achieved nearly new records of unanimity, and I welcome that. It is important, and I look forward to that standard continuing.

On the Chief Secretary's arguments, I have been reading some of the economic debates of the 1920s and 1930s. They are remarkably similar to the arguments heard from the Treasury Bench today. There are many selective statistics, lots of clutching at straws and lots of hopes for recovery. That went on year after year. The Treasury Bench should look at those debates to see how the Government are copying so many of the errors of the past.

In his Budget speech, the Chancellor said:

"My central economic aim is to bring inflation down and keep it down." —[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 163]

I have heard that before. I went back to my valued Red Book of 1980. The medium-term financial strategy for that year said:

"The Government's objectives for the medium-term are to bring down the rate of inflation and to create conditions for a sustainable growth of output and employment."

The only difference is that the events are separated by 12 years. That was why we had three years of unparalleled austerity. We assumed that that phase of the operation to reduce inflation had finished. We thought that the Government had won that limited objective. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) told us of those three years of unparalleled austerity. I wonder whether anybody in the present Government will be equally straightforward and candid and tell us how many years of austerity we shall have to endure this time.

In 1979, the Government were confident that monetarism would solve the problem. They believed that that nonsense would be the solution. They were going to reduce public expenditure and so on. In fact, North sea oil provided the Government with their real assistance to overcome the problems of those years. As a result of their policy, the country suffered. Thirty per cent. of my industrial firms closed and many others suffered as well.

Twelve years later, the same problem confronts the Government as confronted them when they set out. Why is that? Inflation is still with us, but it is more severe in one respect. We may be in a slump rather than a recession. We are still not in balance in our external payments. Despite the enormous downturn the external payments position is still a major indictment of economic policy. What is to happen when there is some sort of recovery? If we cannot achieve balance of payments equilibrium now, when will we achieve it?

Some say that this is a slump. If it is not a slump, what are the circumstances in which one uses that word, or should it be excised from the English language? I speak to many industrialists, and their major concerns are credit control, insolvencies and so on. They are all increasing their employment in those areas and are watching carefully. They have daily figures to show how many people make payments and how long the payments are being delayed. The old certainty of payments, even from respectable firms, is no longer with us.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) pointed out, it is easy to reduce inflation if there is a single target. One can deflate the economy by high interest rates and, for good measure, add a high exchange rate. One then reduces consumption and companies are destroyed indiscriminately, good and bad. Exports are hard to get with a high exchange rate and imports take advantage of that to compete with our own industries. However, inflation does come down as high interest rates restrict some forms of spending, although not all. Some individuals with high levels of savings profit from high interest rates.

What will happen when there is an upturn? What happens to our balance of payments? There will be an £8 billion deficit next year, and we must wonder where the exports will come from when manufacturers have been so badly damaged by a Government who gave them little consideration and even less assistance. The problem is compounded because, far from the boom being investment-led, as some unwise commentators and Treasury Ministers affirmed, it was consumption-led. The boom was in finance, credit and consumption, none of which helped our long-term trading performance.

The trouble with relying on interest rates is that some people gain and some lose. It is much harder to control the economy through interest rates alone now that so many people have such a high collateral in the houses that they occupy. So, in the middle of a slump, banks and finance houses are still anxiously trying to lend money to those with secure assets. We are paying the penalty of a housing boom fuelled and ignited by the former Prime Minister's dedication to absurdly lavish incentives to home ownership.

Coupled with that, the Conservative party's attitude to pay claims has been farcical. First, the Government said

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

that it did not matter. They said that sterling M3 would take care of it and that controlling the money supply would remove money that might be used for pay increases. If companies paid high claims, they would be squeezed, and if they persisted, they would be eliminated by the operation of the iron hand of monetarism. So far did they believe that nonsense that they thought that they could raise VAT from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. without affecting inflation. It is absurd even to consider that today, but those were the arguments used then. A year after coming to office, without the external trauma provoked by the oil price rises of 1973-74, the Government produced the self-inflicted retail prices index rate of 21·9 per cent. in May 1980.

Eventually, all Governments learn something, and monetarism dropped out of their agenda. They then resorted to exhortation—pleading with industry to restrain pay increases. Their friends in the City responded by awarding themselves the £1 million salaries that have been a feature of this Government. Finally, the Government took refuge in the embrace of the exchange rate mechanism. They are now seeking to discipline employees by threatening them with a fixed and unalterable exchange rate. As if that were not enough, some people are producing the bogey of an independent Bank of England.

I am not against fixed exchange rates. In the past few weeks, we have seen currencies varying by up to 15 per cent. and more, which can play havoc with a company's trading arrangements. When we had a fixed exchange rate up to the early 1970s, such a movement was considered catastrophic—a major devaluation, with all that that implied then. Now, I would wish to see fixed exchange rates that could be changed when the disparities were clear and consistent. I wish to see what I would call fixed but not immutable rates, as was the position in the late 1960s.

The Government made the country pay a terrible price by reducing inflation by a means that caused great unnecessary damage to our economy. Having done that, why did they squander the one gain that they had achieved? After three years of unparalleled austerity and the seven fat years of North sea oil, why did they not look to the industrial investment which could alone prepare us for the rigours of the seven lean years?

The truth is that they thought that our economic salvation lay in the City and its financial organisations. They are only dimly beginning to perceive that financial centres follow wealth creation, which comes mainly from manufacturing. That is why London became such a prominent financial centre; it rose on the backs of Manchester cotton and Birmingham metal industries. The enormous production of the United States created New York's financial centre, and Frankfurt and Tokyo have risen to challenge both older financial centres because of the dominance of manufacturing.

Financial skills are more easily transferable than manufacturing skills. That, more than any of the market operations, threatens the valuable role that is still played by our City institutions. The lesson is that manufacturing industry is the principal begetter of financial institutions. To assume that finance can exist on its own is a folly that only the Government have entertained.

What are the Government doing to help our industries? They have made some concessions in corporation tax. I remind them that, in many cases, the reduced tax does not compensate for the tax paid on inflationary profits. If inflation is 10 per cent., companies are taxed at 3·3 per cent. of the stock that they held at the end of their financial year. Inflation on corporation tax extracts that wrongful penalty from them. For many companies, the reduction in corporation tax, although welcome, will not compensate them for the tax imposed on them because of the Government's failure to control inflation.

The further failure of the Government has been to deal with the drying up of investment. There is no question but that investment is drying up—we can forget the past and the uncertain forms of investment that we had—because the Government did not raise capital allowances. Depreciation of 25 per cent. in the first year is nonsense for many forms of investment, and at a time of stringency they should have been increased. I should have wished capital allowances to be better targeted to manufacturing industry.

I should raise the difficulty of ensuring that people pay the correct amount of tax. The Treasury, quite rightly, and the Inland Revenue certainly, used to oppose the claiming of expenses incurred at work because they thought that it would open the floodgates. I understood that and defended it many times, but now the costs of travelling to and being in work are higher than before and are growing fast.

It would have been absurd for me, 20 or 30 years ago, to say that transport was a major cost of employment. Workers walked up the road to the mill or factory and that was it. They wore the same clothes and slipped back home for lunch. Many of my constituents travel 30 or 40 miles to work but receive no allowances for that. The clothes they wear must be a little better than in the past. They must eat in the canteen, and even a sandwich costs quite a lot. Women particularly, but many men as well, must consider the care of young children. Those major costs must be deducted from take-home pay. It is a serious matter and is becoming more so.

We used to tax investment income from capital at a higher rate. It was argued that it was right to do so, because it was a more secure form of income than earning a living by taking a job. The problem today is not the investment income surcharge but the charge on the individual who must travel to work. Somebody who has investment income pays only for the journey to deposit his money at the bank. The case for an investment income surcharge is made stronger today by the many expenses that are incurred in earning a living.

I welcome the changes in the Bill to excise duties. The retail prices index has been too prominent in keeping down duties on tobacco and alcohol. I would have preferred annual increases, at least to take account of inflation, rather than the Government, quite rightly, having now to try to make good those past lapses. An amendment like the Rooker-Wise amendment for personal allowances would be sensible for excise duties.

I am happy, too, about the move to tax car benefits in kind, but I find the mobile phone tax hard to understand. The wording of the Bill is quite peculiar, but the Standing Committee will have to unravel that.

A higher VAT rate of 17·5 per cent. means that the importance of the anomalies in the boundaries between 17·5 per cent. and zero rate will increase. There were

problems when VAT was 8 per cent., such as the size of the hem of a skirt for clothing allowances. Such anomalies will increase, and the Minister responsible for VAT will be heavily occupied trying to defend them.

I welcome the provisions on mortgage interest relief and the PAYE quarterly payments scheme. VAT bad debt relief and the recognition of the role of child benefit are a move in the right direction.

The Government started with a plan for inflation, and they will end with a plan for inflation. In the meantime, they will regret those years when they fooled around. The next Government, which I hope will be a Labour Government, will look to industry, which will be the only wealth creator. That is the only way of sustaining a prosperous and thriving economy.

5.46 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): I agreed with the emphasis that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) placed on the importance of wealth creation. Having spent most of my working life in the City, I also agreed that in the long term the City will not maintain its important place in international finance unless we improve our wealth creation. We must create more capital more rapidly and spread it more widely.

In my lifetime, there has been an enormous improvement in our standard of living. Many more people own their own homes or are in the process of doing so and many more either have an occupational pension or are gaining entitlement to one than when I was young. Beyond that, amazingly few people have much disposable capital. Their capital is mainly locked up in their house or pension fund. It is extremely difficult, even with the considerable tax reductions made by the Government, for people who start without any money, as I did, to acquire capital.

One of the main differences between this country and the United States is that it is easier to acquire capital in the United States. Someone can arrive in the United States from a third-world country with no English or qualifications, but after 20 years will have acquired a certain amount of disposable capital. One meets such people all over the United States. We do not have nearly such a dynamic economy. One reason for that, apart from the national temperament, is capital gains tax.

I shall confine my brief remarks entirely to the capital gains tax aspect of the Finance Bill. I argue, as I have for a great many years, that we should abolish capital gains tax in the long term, although it may be necessary to have a short-term capital gains tax for, say, six or 12 months to make income tax avoidance difficult. People often forget that we have had a capital gains tax for only a short period of our fiscal history. Even Sir Stafford Cripps did not introduce a capital gains tax.

I was in at the start of it in a funny way because, when he was Chancellor, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd asked me to talk to him about bond washing. I was a stockbroker and he assumed that I would understand how bond washing was done although my firm never did it. He told me that he wanted to stop it. I went along to the Treasury and tried to explain how bond washing was carried out although, as I was cross-questioned by Selwyn Lloyd and his senior civil servants, it became clear to me that I did not really understand how it was done. Selwyn Lloyd introduced a short-term capital gains tax in the 1962 Budget—primarily to stop bond washing.

In 1960-61, Britain had just had a mini-boom. It was nothing like as big as the boom of 1987-88, but it was a mini-boom with a certain amount of speculative land activity and a good deal of bond washing, out of which some people were making large sums at the expense of the general taxpayer. That was why a Conservative Government introduced a short-term capital gains tax. It was not intended as a general tax; it was a special tax to clobber the spivs, which is why it was supported by the Conservative parliamentary party at the time, but with some misgivings. In 1965, the Labour Government turned it into a permanent capital gains tax, although Selwyn Lloyd's short-term capital gains tax was not repealed until the 1971 Budget. This country has had a permanent capital gains tax of 30 per cent. since 1965 and I have always though it a bad thing.

About 20 years ago, I remember asking Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, how he accounted for the fact that his country, which had such an interventionist industrial policy and such high rates of income tax, had such a dynamic economy. He said that it was because Singapore did not have a capital gains tax. Last year in his economic report to Congress, President George Bush sent the same message—that if he was to make the United States economy more dynamic, he would like to see the CGT rate in the United States reduced from its present level of 28 per cent. He expressed the hope that he could get rid of it altogether.

I do not think that anybody who has ever considered capital gains tax in any advanced country has denied that it has a bad effect on entrepreneurial activity. It distorts all sorts of markets. It dissuades people from selling shares and other things in an attempt to avoid capital gains tax when, on normal economic criteria, they would think that it was right to do so. A great many people nowadays have second homes, but because the principal home is excluded from capital gains tax, elderly people defer selling their second home, thinking, "When I die, the second home will not attract any capital gains tax." Capital gains tax means that, over a huge range of activity, people take decisions on disposals not on the merits of the disposal or its timing, but primarily because of the tax considerations.

However, worse than all that is the appalling complexity of the tax which has worsened with every passing Budget. Governments are always tinkering with it. I have not checked, but I doubt whether there has been a single spring Finance Bill since 1965 in which capital gains tax has not been amended in an attempt to remove the anomalies that were created by previous amendments. This Finance Bill is no exception. The country's accountancy industry and tax lawyers spend a disproportionate amount of their time on capital gains tax. This Bill, for example, refers to overseas trusts, which have been legislated on in previous Finance Bills. People who become involved with overseas trusts do so primarily to avoid CGT.

The return to the Revenue in the yield from capital gains tax is wholly inadequate when compared with the damage that it does to the economy and with the amount of time that some of our top professional brains spend on it. According to this year's Red Book, the yield for the current financial year is expected to be £1·4 billion. That is quite a large sum, but only a small element in the Budget. Last year, the yield was £1·9 billion. The yield has been decreasing steeply since CGT was indexed. The indexation of capital gains tax removed some of its considerable

[Sir Peter Tapsell]

injustices because until the introduction of the 1982 and 1985 provisions, people were paying tax not on any real gain, but on the nominal gain of inflation. With inflation at 10 per cent. last year, one must deduct 10 per cent. from the rate of CGT. Obviously, therefore, the CGT yield is likely to come down unless capital values keep pace with the RPI.

When the Tory party was in opposition and I was a Front-Bench Opposition spokesman——

Mr. Robert Sheldon: And a very good one.

Sir Peter Tapsell: The right hon. Gentleman and I had many debates then.

At that time, the Tory team all agreed to get rid of capital gains tax. I was the only member of the team who thought that we should keep even a short-term capital gains tax. My right hon. Friends the Members for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) and all the subsequent Chancellors of Conservative Administrations thought that it should be completely abolished. I am amazed that after 11 years of Conservative Government we have still not got rid of CGT. Since 1979, I have written to every Financial Secretary to the Treasury well before each Budget urging that we should get rid of it. They have always written back most sympathetically and taken me to one side in a corridor or bar and said, "Yes, what a good idea, but the Inland Revenue does not want to get rid of it." The Revenue does not want to get rid of it because CGT is regarded by it as an essential means of preventing people from turning income into capital and thus avoiding income tax.

Mr. Mellor *indicated assent.*

Sir Peter Tapsell: I am glad that the Chief Secretary is confirming that. No doubt the Inland Revenue is still saying the same thing to him——

Mr. Mellor: At least it is consistent.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Yes, consistently wrong. There may be considerable strength in its argument that, without any capital gains tax, rich people with good professional advisers would try to avoid paying so much income tax and would try to turn as much as possible of their income into capital gains. Even if that is true—and it is true, up to a point—the fact is that capital gains tax has not done the prevention job for the Inland Revenue. If it had, it would not be necessary in Finance Bill after Finance Bill to pass special provisions that are separate from CGT to deal with the loopholes by which people seek to avoid income tax by turning income into capital gains and then seek to avoid that capital gains tax by moving into overseas trusts and other devices.

I hope that CGT will be abolished. As a result of my conversations with successive Financial Secretaries I thought that it would eventually be abolished, so I was astonished and dismayed to find that instead of the reduction to a rate of 20 per cent. which I urged, or abolition, in the Budget of 1988 my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby increased the rate from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. to link it to the top band of income tax. He thus introduced an entirely new principle into our fiscal system.

It had always been accepted by all Governments—going back to the time of Sir Stafford Northcote when we began discussing such matters—that income and capital were different and should be treated and taxed differently. With the apparent support of all members of my party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby introduced the concept of treating capital and income in the same way and he increased the rate of CGT from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. Given that we had earlier reduced the rate of income tax from 83 per cent. to 25 per cent., and 40 per cent., and indexed the CGT structure, that move to 40 per cent. would not have been so bad were it not for the establishment of that dangerous principle. Even in opposition, Labour Members now say openly that were they to take office they would increase the top rate of income tax to 50 per cent. and add a national insurance surcharge—as it were—9 per cent. So the top rate of tax would go straight from 40 per cent. to 59 per cent. We have not heard about it from them today or in their document, but I hope that we shall be told whether they would do the same with CGT.

Once we have accepted the principle that the rate of CGT is linked to the top income tax rate, there is a tremendous danger that, if income tax rates are increased to, say, 50 per cent., Labour would say that when the Conservative Government were in power they accepted the principle of parity between the two, so they have automatically increased CGT to the same level. If the rate of CGT was 50 per cent. or 59 per cent., we should have one of the highest—if not the highest—rate in the advanced world.

I cannot understand why my right hon. and hon. Friends are prepared to accept this situation. Many of them are far more enthusiastic than I about the wholly free operation of markets—it has always been my experience that the people who are most enthusiastic about the free operation of markets are those who have least practical experience of operating in them. I am a capitalist and I believe in free enterprise and in private savings. Over a 40-year period I managed, with the greatest difficulty, to acquire some savings and I should like other people to have the opportunity to do the same, but rather more quickly. If one believes in a free-enterprise capitalist economy, one must be hostile to CGT. I hope that on Report the Government will decide to abolish at least a long-term capital gains tax. If they are not prepared to do so, I hope that, for the political reasons that I have given, they will at least detach the rate of CGT from the rate of income tax and levy it at, say, 20 per cent. and make it clear that, as in the past, capital and income are different and must be treated separately.

6.3 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In his opening remarks, the Chief Secretary rightly said that there is an economic context for the debate, although his use of quotations to describe that context is slightly different from mine. I hope that we can reach agreement on the basic proposition that we are in the middle—or in the course—of a serious recession. I had better not say "middle" because that presumes that we know when the end will be. The recession is more serious than the

Government predicted, but as serious as the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee predicted. Getting out of the recession will be a difficult task and will not necessarily be achieved quickly.

Paragraph 6 of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report states:

"Taking a longer period, the Treasury are now forecasting two half years of falling output; and output will now be 4·5 per cent. lower in the second half of 1991 than forecast for the same period just four months earlier. Clearly this is more than a relatively short-lived and shallow recession."

The Government should stop pretending otherwise. They are in danger of being deceived by their own rhetoric. I understand why Governments confronted with elections try to make a story sound better than it is, but there are disadvantages to that. It has the effect of leading people to misunderstand the measures that might be needed and of making it more difficult for the Government to take those measures. For the Government to take some of the steps that we are urging on them might appear to be an admission of guilt on their part and an admission that things are worse than they have said. I should not want to put them in such a difficult position.

I make the same argument about inflation. As long as the Government pretend that it is not as bad as it is, they make it hard to persuade people of the importance of the measures necessary to deal with it. I shall return to that issue later.

The Chief Secretary quoted from the CBI survey and from the CBI's comments on the survey. I shall quote more fully the comments made by Mr. Wigglesworth, the chairman of the CBI's economic committee, which is responsible for the report. He said:

"Although the trend in output appears to be levelling out it is too early to speak of recovery."

That is quite different from what the Chancellor has said. Mr. Wigglesworth continued:

"The survey shows that the intensity of the downturn is slackening and we may be approaching the turning point."

The Government can reasonably claim that there is light at the end of the tunnel, but not that we have reached the turning point or that we have turned the corner.

All this language about turning the corner makes me think that what is at the back of the Chancellor's mind is the Noel Coward song which states:

"There are bad times just around the corner,
There are dark clouds hurtling through the sky,
And it's no good whining
About a silver lining
For we know from experience that they won't roll by."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Sing it!"] If there are any more requests, I might sing. What we do know from experience is that the Government's forecasts about the recession and about inflation tend to be inadequate. They are repeatedly inadequate and the Select Committee's report contains some useful tables showing how far that is so.

I shall now deal with inflation. Language such as that used by the Prime Minister, who said that we have inflation "by the throat", also has a self-deceiving quality. We have not got inflation by the throat. The Government are making progress with headline inflation, but admit in their own forecast that underlying inflation will remain high and will be more than 7 per cent. even at the end of the year. I have listened to many lectures from Treasury Ministers about how deceptive the headline inflation figure is, especially with all the jiggery-pokery of the poll tax.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): If the hon. Gentleman is right and we are less successful in reducing inflation than we believe, why did he recommend this morning that we should loosen monetary policy by reducing interest rates?

Mr. Beith: Given the discipline of the exchange rate mechanism, I believe that it is now possible further to reduce interest rates while having an anti-inflationary policy. The Government also believe that, which is why they have made careful reductions of 0·5 per cent. at a time. I believe that they will make another reduction within the next three or four weeks.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): At the Scottish Tory party conference.

Mr. Beith: Most reductions in interest rates coincide with events such as debates in the House of Commons or party conferences, and the Scottish Conservative party conference seems a likely place.

It is possible to reduce interest rates now without threatening the anti-inflationary policy. It would not have been sensible to make a large and sudden reduction of, say, 2 per cent. to 3 per cent. in the weeks when our position in the ERM was uncertain. However, I am sure that Ministers will agree that the circumstances are now favourable for a reduction that would help us to deal with inflation.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we can succeed by cutting interest rates and that inflation will still fall? He has just complained that underlying inflation is going to remain stubbornly high. Is he now saying that it will fall even if we cut interest rates?

Mr. Beith: The present level of interest rates is not necessary to assist in the battle against inflation. There will come a time when the Government will need to look to interest rate policy because of further inflationary pressures in the system. I am not sure whether the Government have recognised how difficult the situation might be when recovery begins. At the point of recovery it is difficult to maintain anti-inflationary policies and that is why we argued that it would be better to place responsibility for interest rate policy in the hands of a central bank with responsibility for price stability.

I was interested in the different responses of two Ministers on that subject. When I engaged in a discussion on the radio at lunchtime with the Secretary of State for Employment, he tried to dismiss the idea as ludicrous and one which no civilised country would adopt. Obviously he was totally unaware of the way in which Germany has operated for many years. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer appeared before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, he was at pains not to take that view. He took what I can only describe as a holding position.

The Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee put the remarks of the Governor to the Chancellor, who responded to the Governor's view that a more independent role for the central bank would help in the battle against inflation by saying that countries differ in their practices in that respect. Some countries, he said, use a more independent central bank while others do not. Some have found that helpful in fighting inflation while others do not appear to need it. That was a perfectly respectable reply and one which is consistent with the Government in due course moving towards us on this policy, as they have with regard to several other policies, such as membership of the exchange rate mechanism. I

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suspect that there may be a rethink in the Treasury which has not been communicated to the Secretary of State for Employment, who does not seem to get on very well with the Treasury anyway. He was not very successful in getting a decent training programme out of the Treasury, so it would not be surprising if the Treasury had not told him about its thinking with regard to central bank independence.

It is striking that inflation is always reduced in advance of an election and that is clear if we consider the statistics over several years. However, it is not consistent with a sound anti-inflationary policy. Ministers have often told us that underlying inflation is important and that the headline figure is misleading. I cannot think of a better moment for the Government to act on their suggestion that we should have a new index of inflation. What better time could there be to devise a new index that took proper account of housing costs? It would have to do that; it could not omit all references to the effect of mortgage interest. If the Government were now to introduce such a new index, no one could accuse them of deliberately distorting the statistics in order to obtain a more favourable figure. The time is right for the Government to make an objective improvement in the way in which inflation is measured.

The time is also right for the Government to take steps to help the country with the consequences of the recession which they have caused and which stems from the mismanagement of the credit boom. The Government could invest in a significant training programme, and by that I do not mean the training relief to which the Chief Secretary to the Treasury referred. How he can possibly advance that as significant in the present context, I just do not know. It does not happen until 1992-93; it applies only to people who finance their own training; and it represents only £15 million of public investment in training. It has absolutely nothing to do with the scale of skills shortages which industry is now experiencing and the contribution that training could make to solving that problem.

I am surprised that the Government's traditional desire to see the unemployment statistics improved has not led to more expenditure on training. When budgets for training were first cut significantly and Ministers were asked in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee to explain why that had happened, we were told that it was because unemployment had fallen. That was a strange view of training, which is necessary whether people are employed or unemployed. The recession calls for a major improvement in training.

Fiscal policy must also play a more important part in dealing with the recession. The Government have accepted in the Budget and in what they have told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that automatic stabilisers are an important way in which fiscal policy contributes to handling a recession. The Select Committee records its appreciation that the Government made that point clear because it has tended to be obscured in the past. However, there is further scope in the measures, that I have described for a policy actively to encourage the country out of recession without taking inflationary measures, and training and investment in transport are part of those measures. Present circumstances also allow a further interest rate cut, which would help to handle the problems of the recession.

Why do we not have a draft Finance Bill? Would not it be more sensible for measures of this detail to be produced in draft form for widespread discussion instead of being pushed into a concentrated process that does not permit anything like the detailed consideration that it deserves? The Government tested the waters on this with a number of tax measures in last year's Finance Bill and that of the previous year. Why not introduce a draft Finance Bill system? Why not have a draft Budget? There are relatively few Budget measures which cannot be discussed over a period of time and which are so market-sensitive that they can be announced only overnight in a dramatic Budget day announcement. Much of the Bill's contents could have been discussed over a longer period.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury made great play of the fact that the Government have abolished six taxes. He was going for the George Bush award for how well one can stick to one's promise of no new taxes. The Government who claim that they are abolishing taxes have also raised VAT by 2·5 per cent. They also gave us the poll tax, they hope to give us the council tax after three more years of the poll tax and they have also introduced the 50 per cent. port privatisation tax. That is a long string of new taxes for a Government who claim not to like taxes.

I liked the way in which the Chief Secretary introduced the VAT increase. He said that it was a reasonable step to take in the circumstances "in which we found ourselves" —circumstances in which they found themselves? The Government created the circumstances. They invented the poll tax and they created the mess. They then found themselves, as though by accident, in circumstances from which the only escape from the catastrophe wished upon them from somewhere else was to slap 2·5 per cent. on VAT with all the consequences for families, charities, businesses and the retail trade. What a hopeless alibi. The Chief Secretary would have demolished that alibi in his Bar days if it had been advanced by a common pickpocket.

There were some simple alternatives. The Government were right to conclude that they had to do something about the ludicrously high rates of poll tax, but they had left it too late even to introduce the relatively straightforward mechanism of local income tax for the coming year. They could have transferred the cost to national income tax which would have been a fairer way of raising the money. I am surprised that the Government did not do that. Indeed, some Conservative Members would have preferred that step. As it is, the Government have left charities with an extra burden of £33 million a year in additional VAT. The Chief Secretary refers to the reliefs for charities in the Bill. There are some reliefs, but when the Bill was drafted no one thought that an extra £33 million would be taken from charities as a result of a separate increase in VAT. The Chief Secretary must reconsider the treatment of charities in the Bill and attempt to compensate for that serious increase.

I remind Treasury Ministers that they have a responsibility for the Inland Revenue. While we are talking about new taxes and the administration of taxes, perhaps we should bear in mind the fact that one of the problems that they will have with the council tax will lie with the Inland Revenue. Ministers have been saying that there will not be many appeals under the procedures recommended for the council tax and that everybody will

be happy with the band into which they are put. I do not think that that is true at all. Indeed, doubts about it are already apparent in the hasty but now abandoned reconsideration of whether to have nine bands instead of seven.

I hope that Ministers will remember that there are now 650,000 outstanding appeals on business rates with which the system has not yet been able to cope. There are even 30,000 appeals arising from the old rating system with which valuation officers and the appeals machinery have still not been able to deal. That is more than a year after we have finished with the rating system, and there are 30,000 outstanding appeals. The Inland Revenue is in for a very interesting time if the council tax ever sees the light of day.

Mr. Roger King: The hon. Gentleman has criticised the new system of council tax, the valuation of properties and the appeals procedure. His party wants to introduce a local income tax. As he will appreciate, incomes are often not strictly related to the year that has just passed or to the year that will come, because of various claims and other incomes that must be assessed. How many appeals does the hon. Gentleman think a local income tax would create?

Mr. Beith: The local income tax system would not create any more appeals than income tax itself creates, because appeals do not arise over the level of the tax. They arise over the liability of the individual. Appeals would therefore arise from the basic national income tax that an individual was paying, whether or not a local income tax figure was added to that. It would make no difference to the appeals machinery.

I challenged the Chief Secretary on the uniform business rate and the enormous additional burden on business. In reply, he said that it is much better than having a lot of local councils, some of which imposed high increases in rates which hit the business community in their areas. He has imposed on business across the whole country from Bath to Berwick-upon-Tweed—it is noticed in both places, particularly the former—an increase in the business rate which is more than twice the level of inflation which he now says we shall experience this year. He complained about local authorities charging 40 per cent. or 50 per cent. more than inflation. He will charge more than twice what he now believes inflation will be, and significantly more than he was predicting it would be when the rate was fixed at 10·9 per cent., which is the highest level by which the Government were permitted to increase the business rate.

Mr. Watts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I shall not give way any more because time is running out and I was hoping to make some brief comments before concluding my remarks.

As hon. Members have said, another matter of concern is clause 50. The retrospective and double taxation aspects of it are of such concern that they should have been discussed on the Floor of the House and not upstairs in Committee, and I shall vote accordingly. Nobody consulted us on whether clause 50 should be taken on the Floor of the House or in Committee. I hope that the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) will insist on his motion that it be taken on the Floor of the House and the Government could still easily concede that.

There are omissions from the Bill too numerous to mention. For example, I refer to the environmental taxes, which were hinted at in the White Paper; the relief for child care, about which there was much discussion before the Budget and for which we pressed when we discussed the two previous Finance Bills; and the abolition of tax relief for private medical insurance, which would have enabled at least some funds to go indirectly into a health service in which job losses are taking place. These would have been welcome features of the Bill.

There are useful matters in the Bill—for example, the restriction of mortgage interest relief to the basic rate, the action on company cars and the VAT threshold increase. They are welcome features. However, I have the feeling that the Bill was conceived as one which contained a great many matters that could easily be dropped at the last minute if there were to be a sudden general election and an agreed version of the Bill could have been quickly brought forward. I should have welcomed that. I would much rather go round the country in the June sunshine, urging people to vote Liberal Democrat, than sit in a Committee Room considering the details of the Bill, as we are now certain to do. I see no sign of that June election taking place.

6.23 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) may have an opportunity to go around in the June sunshine during a general election, but it will be in June next year rather than in June this year.

Traditionally, the Second Reading debate on the Finance Bill is wide ranging. It always presents the Chief Secretary of the day with a difficult task because he has an obligation to refer in some detail to the individual provisions of the Bill while setting the framework within which the Bill is introduced. My right hon. and learned Friend hit a good balance, and showed a remarkable grasp in response to the detailed interventions to which he was subjected. The House should be grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for the situation described in paragraph 92 of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee report, which brings up to date the contributions that have been received by the Government or have been promised to the Government in response to the appeal for other countries to help to finance the war in the Gulf and the efforts that we made there. To a considerable extent, that is a reflection of the effort that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary has put into those difficult negotiations. I am grateful also for his kind remarks about the Committee's report, which helped to put some of the press comments about it into perspective.

The centrepiece of the Budget is the increase in VAT, with the corresponding decrease in the community charge —the switch from local to central Government taxation. The House will know from my speech in the debate on the Budget that I should have liked to go further and abolish local taxation altogether. However, that is clearly a move in the right direction. The community charge was an improvement on the rates and, in turn, the council tax will be an improvement on the community charge. We are going in the right direction. Therefore, I very much welcome the proposals. Nonetheless, the measure will raise only about 11 per cent. of local government finance. At

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some stage, we must consider whether the task that that tax will perform is sensible. Nonetheless, the central part of the Budget in that respect is right, and I welcome it.

The Treasury Select Committee report puts the Finance Bill in perspective. Of course, as we rightly point out, we have a recession which is more serious than the Treasury anticipated. We want to be quite clear about the causes of the recession. As the evidence from the Governor of the Bank of England makes clear, it is a reflection of the action that the Government have needed to take because inflation took off following the stock exchange crash of 1987. It is common ground that there was a misjudgment at that time. The present Prime Minister and the present Chancellor accept that there was an error of judgment at that time, against a background of very faulty statistics.

he point that must be made strongly is that inflation and the subsequent recession would have been a great deal worse if the Government had accepted the views that the Opposition put forward at that time. I have looked carefully at the record. It is quite apparent from the speeches by the shadow Chancellor—the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)—the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), and a number of others that they were advocating a massive fiscal stimulus on the one hand and reductions in interest rates on the other hand. Having gone through that record, I was rather surprised only a few weeks ago to hear, on the Walden programme, the shadow Chancellor say:

"There was a problem following the crash. The great error of the Conservative party was not having lower interest rates at that time."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman still does not understand that he was wrong then, that he is wrong now, and that, if we had done what he suggested, the recession would be a great deal worse. I do not know whether it is a Scottish legal expression—it is a legal expression otherwise—but the shadow Chancellor is estopped from the kind of criticism that he has made. He should recognise that and come clean.

I now refer to the report of the Treasury Select Committee. I was somewhat surprised by the headlines that accompanied some press reports on it because it was mixed up with the conference of the Institute of Directors and some comments that were made there. The report contains a number of criticisms, to which I shall refer in a moment. The Institute of Directors was being a little unfair in some respects. In his conference speech, which I thought was very good, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor pointed out that he had accepted virtually every recommendation that the institute had made in its Budget representations. That being the case, the criticism was rather surprising.

The Treasury Select Committee is particularly critical about forecasts. We point out that, at this time last year, we drew attention to the fact that the history of these matters shows that it is always difficult to detect turning points in the economy. The figures show that the effect, whether downward or upward, has always been under-estimated in the official forecasts. The Committee says that the errors in the forecasts have become worse and worse in successive economic cycles. At the time of the autumn statement, we said that, in our opinion, the Treasury forecasts were wrong. That view has certainly been vindicated by subsequent events, as is evidenced by the facts set out in the Red Book.

The Chancellor and his team are working under a severe handicap with forecasts. As to whether there is a Budget surplus or a Budget deficit, leading to either a public sector debt repayment or a public sector borrowing requirement, the official forecast, based on experience, is that the margin of error will be £5·75 million in either direction. That is an enormous margin of error. Repeating the corny analogy that I used the other day, I shall say simply that the Chancellor is trying to drive a car with an enormous amount of play in the steering—verging on one side to inflation and on the other side to unemployment. There is little clear guidance as to what is happening. The Committee is right to suggest that there should be an inquiry into the forecasting processes, in addition to the existing one concerning the improvement of statistics. We have a difficult and dangerous situation. In the context of the economic cost of the problems of managing the economy on the basis of the present forecasts, the cost of such an inquiry would be insignificant. The Opposition would simply veer off in the direction of inflation. They would drive straight off the road at an accelerating pace. We, on the other hand, say that we have got to get the steering right.

We need quarterly, rather than half-yearly, forecasts. Everyone else produces quarterly forecasts. Indeed, for some it is a monthly process. Given the variation between the situation of last autumn and the current situation, we ought to have had an interim forecast. The expenditure that the production of such forecasts would involve would be worthwhile. The Committee has been addressing this real problem.

The Government's overall strategy operates within the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. The Chancellor is reducing interest rates as inflation comes down. In our report, we point out that the RPI forecast may well prove to be pessimistic. In other words, the rate may well come down even faster than the Government are forecasting, and, at any rate, to 4 per cent. by the end of the year. Of course, the underlying rate is a more difficult matter. It is particularly dependent on wage settlements, and here the public sector has an important role to play in bringing down the general level. We are not keen on staged settlements, which may well turn out to be examples of putting off the evil day. In this connection, the Institute of Directors has an important role to play. We do not know whether the foreign exchange markets will put more emphasis on the RPI or on the underlying rate of inflation, but I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend is right to say that we do not want interest rates to be cut prematurely, and then raised again. That would be the worst possible course for business confidence. Thus, my right hon. Friend must be cautious.

I welcome the fact that, in response to the Committee's earlier reports, the Treasury has said categorically that it accepts the role of the automatic stabilisers. If, as a result of increased unemployment benefit during a recession, or falling revenue and smaller profits, the deficit increases or the surplus decreases, the Government will not now take that into account. In other words, they will allow the stabilisers to work. A few days ago, there were press reports to the effect that if expenditure on unemployment

benefit would increase, there would have to be corresponding savings elswhere. That is not my understanding of Government policy.

Mr. Mellor *indicated assent.*

Mr. Higgins: I am glad to see that my right hon. and learned Friend agrees. I presume that the writer of the press article was living in the past. Automatic stabilisers have an important role to play. The Committee makes some specific remarks about whether the automatic effect is at the desirable level. In paragraph 26, we suggest that some modification might be appropriate.

It is clear that the Government's objective is to achieve a balanced budget over the medium term. However, they fully accept that, over the cycle, there may well have to be a surplus in some years and a deficit in others. That is entirely appropriate. The Government's policy on interest rates, combined with the effects of the stabilisers and of fiscal policy, which has shown a substantial move into deficit——I believe that the foreign exchange markets realise that, as the Treasury Select Committee says, this is a sensible reaction to the present economic situation—gives us reason to believe that we may look for an upturn.

The Committee's report is, of course, based on the evidence that it received. That is the purpose of Committees of this House. Reflection on the facts is an important component of the influence on our report, as is the evidence that we received. Clearly, we do not yet see clear evidence of an upturn. As has been pointed out, the unemployment figures are a lagging indicator. The policy as now enunciated is significantly different from the policy of six or nine months ago. That applies both to fiscal policy and to interest rates. I believe that the Government are now on the right course. If we can achieve some improvement in forecasting and in a number of other factors, the Committee will have fulfilled a useful function by keeping the Government on the right lines and ensuring that the recession is shorter than would otherwise have been the case. I welcomed the Government's acceptance of a number of the Committee's recommendations, and I look forward to their accepting even more in the future.

6.37 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The unpopularity of the poll tax has diverted attention from the Government's failure with the economy. No hon. Member, recalling to what extent the Government were responsible for the 1980-81 recession, could really have expected that the country would ever again be called upon to go through all that. Then there was great talk about the need to shake out surplus labour in order to produce a leaner and fitter industry. That recession cleared my constituency of its industry. When I became the constituency's Member of Parliament, it was regarded as the most industrial area in western Europe. Now it has only one firm of any size and several smaller single entrepreneurial ventures—to become businesses, we hope, but that is a matter about which I shall say something in a few minutes.

We are now doing it all over again, and it is still not working. Manufacturing output is plummeting, investment is collapsing and unemployment registered a record rise last month. But, disturbingly—here I reflect the experience of my own constituents—by comparison with 1980-81, more of the assets that are now being brought into receivership appear to have real value, as distinct from a scrap value. Again, I shall say more later.

Although cuts in corporation tax will undoubtedly produce an increase in investment by the mid-1990s, could not the Chancellor have chosen other measures—such as investment allowances—if he wished to produce a surge in investment in the short term? Surely that is what hon. Members on both sides of the House see as our greatest need. The Retail Consortium welcomes the downward trend in interest costs but believes that further sustained cuts are needed.

How fragile demand has become was brought home to us yesterday by the shock announcement of layoffs by Marks and Spencer. Some hon. Gentlemen from both sides of the House—I was one of them—visited the corporate headquarters of Marks and Spencer in Baker street only last week. We know what its problem is—lack of demand.

The Budget decision to finance a reduction in poll tax bills by increasing VAT to 17·5 per cent. was clearly done with a cynical eye on the RPI, but that political manipulation of VAT will have far-reaching consequences and will place, for example, those involved in the bloodstock industry in the United Kingdom, following the arrival of the single market in 1993, at a tremendous disadvantage with their European partners, and in particular with the Irish and the French. It is an important matter which will need to be pursued in Committee, presumably on the Floor of the House. The increase in VAT presents the most serious threat to racecourse revenues and to thoroughbred breeding, and even calls into question the future of Tattersalls and Doncaster bloodstock sales. The Chief Secretary's confirmation that the Minister of State will receive a deputation early next week is very welcome.

Despite the findings of the latest CBI survey, to which the Chief Secretary referred, Britain's business leaders have severely criticised the Government's economic record. Although a handful of companies in specialist or niche markets are doing well, the majority of members of the engineering employers' association of Sheffield, as I reminded the House earlier this afternoon, according to its April quarterly business trends survey, distributed only yesterday, are finding the recession worse than that of the early 1980s. Last week, the president of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce publicly declared the Chancellor to be too optimistic. The Chancellor himself may now be of the same mind in view of recent utterances.

As for inflation, according to almost every ministerial speech, it is being sent packing. On the short-term outlook for the headline inflation rate, Ministers must be on fairly solid ground, but the broadest inflation measure, the gross domestic product deflator, is another matter. Falling it certainly is, but, in the words of the chairman of the Conservative party, it is not "plummeting like a stone". Nor do the latest producer-price figures support the Prime Minister's claim that the Government have inflation "by the throat".

Indeed, the Nomura Research Institute, in a new analysis, suggests that economic recovery will bring with it the speedy return of Britain's inflation and current account problems. It will not be easy for the Government to stimulate the economy at home on the one hand and on the other achieve purchasing power parity abroad, while at the same time arriving at a convenient election date.

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Nowadays, however, it is no longer possible to blame the trade unions for most of that. Strikes remain at a very low level, and the number of days lost in January was the lowest for any month in 41 years.

Nor is it hard to see who the pacemakers in the pay league have been in recent years. A recent survey for the CBI found that directors' salaries are rising by an average of 14 per cent. and have outstripped those of other employees for more than five years.

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce has conducted a survey of 7,000 businesses in 15 regions. It finds that all regions are suffering, with London, the west midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside being the worst hit. With the permission of hon. Members, I should like to dwell on my own region of Yorkshire and Humberside. The recession is tightening its grip on the region, despite its contribution to Britain's export drive—27·9 per cent. of its GDP, as recognised last week in the Queen's birthday accolade to industry. The 1980s saw the loss of almost a quarter of Yorkshire's manufacturing jobs, yet Government preferential aid to the region's industry is less than 6 per cent. of the total for the entire United Kingdom. EC funding in 1987-88 was eight times domestic funding.

As Yorkshire industry struggles to haul itself out of the pre-war era—its prime task now—thousands of small businesses are threatened by insolvency, according to the chairman of Sheffield enterprise agency. The old staples in Yorkshire, part of the cradle of our industrial society, are bent on the vital task of regeneration. Small businesses have been set up by skilled engineers and ex-coal miners in south Yorkshire and by Asian entrepreneurs elsewhere in the region, notably in Bradford and Kirklees. All promise to make substantial contributions to the local economies. However, interest rates are the trigger that have produced the slide into recession and that are pushing them into insolvency, thus threatening the existence of that fertile seedbed which is so vital to our future.

In Sheffield, it has been evident for some time that there is a clear need for a strong proactive policy to regenerate the local economy. That is the city's main task. Thus, it has diversified from its steel-producing roots to adapt to changing times and technology.

The city has also entered into a unique partnership between business and the community. Instead of rebuilding the past, the city is concentrating on using Sheffield's strengths to create a new culture, but it is choking in the present business climate. Its £2 billion redevelopment programme is being hit harder and harder by the recession. The number of projects delayed and abandoned is rising, piling on the misery for firms involved in the construction and development industries.

Sheffield is within the major conurbation of South Yorkshire, along with Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. The area may still be regarded by those who have not visited it in recent years as a traditional manufacturing region, but it is increasingly attractive as a cost-effective location for service, financial and administrative business. But it needs a different financial regime from that set out in the Bill.

Mr. Mans: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us what the effect of the unified business rate is on his city?

Mr. Duffy: Of course, that is one problem that small businesses are trying to shoulder. I receive more complaints about that than about most problems now facing small business men.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): It is not as bad as it was.

Mr. Duffy: It is still burdensome. I have found in reaction to the Budget that there is still the same concern not only about the uniform business rate but about corporation tax, despite the changes. There will be no flags out in Sheffield on those two counts.

We all appreciate the need to control inflation. We do not minimise the task facing the Government, and we wish them well. It has to be mastered, but is it enough to rely solely on narrow, deflationary policies and to put the whole burden on the unemployed and the small business man? We need a broader range of policies: credit controls as well as lower interest rates, a greater emphasis on education and training, a modernisation of our infrastructure and greater investment in manufacturing. Above all, we need the involvement of both sides of industry if we are to make any headway towards low inflation and also a low unemployment society.

6.50 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I quite often follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), usually in shipping debates, which is one of the subjects that he did not mention today. I hope to be allowed to remedy that situation and that he will be able to support my words. However, I would like to pick up one thing that the hon. Gentleman said. My understanding was that in Sheffield the uniform business rate had meant a reduction in costs from the old rating system. Of course, as we all know, corporation tax has gone down dramatically. We are delighted to ensure that rates and costs to businesses continue to fall.

There is much to commend in this Finance Bill: lower corporation tax, relief on bad debts, help for charities, a boost for training, increased benefits for the needy and, above all, the continuation of a move from direct to indirect taxation. That is what encourages us all to plan for the future; that promotes investment, effort, thrift and enterprise and discourages conspicuous consumption. After all, we all want a nation that thinks of its future, and it is about the future, in particular the future of the British shipping industry, that I intend to speak today.

Shipping is one of the major invisible earners in the country. It contributes, together with other maritime-related industries, more than £5 billion a year to our balance of payments. It provides training and skilled employment and is essential for the defence of the realm.

These facts are accepted by the Government. It was, after all, the Government who set up the joint working party of the industry, together with the Ministries of Transport and Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury. It was this group which categorised British shipping as "a vital national asset" in economic and in defence terms.

Nor is that point lost on the House. My early-day motion 500, entitled "Merchant Navy", called upon the Government

"to take immediate and positive action to first ensure that the British fleet is strengthened by appropriate stimulation of investment in modern tonnage and second encourage the recruitment, training and employment of British seafarers."

It attracted 356 signatures, 166 of which came from the Conservative Benches, and with very good reason. The United Kingdom-based fleet has declined by 90 per cent. in the past 10 years; it is one tenth of what it was a decade ago and the average age of what is left is greater than the world average. At the same time and within the same period, just 10 years, the number of British seafarers has fallen by two thirds.

The continued contraction of the British fleet is a direct result of the nature of the competition that it faces—a competition which enjoys special advantages beyond normal commercial competitiveness. The two most important of these special advantages, those which are pertinent to today's debate, are the cost of investment and the cost of employing British crews.

Major competitors—Germany, Denmark, Norway and many others—employ schemes to encourage investment in ships. Direct investment grants, soft loans, accelerated depreciation arrangements, special tax breaks, low or nil corporation tax—these and others all make the capital costs of France, Norway, Liberia, Denmark, Greece, Germany, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands lower than ours. Nor can we match their crew costs. While the greatest competition inevitably comes from countries where labour is cheaper than in western Europe, other western nations—Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal—have acted. They have introduced schemes, including exempting seafarers from income tax and national insurance payments, to reduce the disincentive of employing their own nationals.

None of this is new. The industry, employers and employees, and many on both sides of the House, have expressed their concern over many years. What is new is the way in which the joint working party has given new urgency to the central question—what is to be done?

The answer has been identified by the industry. It has proposed specific fiscal measures which would, first, stimulate investment and fleet renewal and, secondly, encourage the continued employment of British seamen.

One conclusion of the joint working party was the following:

"The UK's fleet is ageing . . . The overall level of investment by British companies is below that necessary to maintain the fleet at present levels."

With 75 per cent. of our ships requiring replacement by the year 2000, a major programme of fleet renewal is urgently necessary. First-year allowances on a temporary basis for, say, five years would meet that objective; and the cost would be nothing unless there were new investment, and then it would be only in terms of the deferment of corporation tax on profitable enterprises.

The benefit to British ship-owning companies would be considerable. By improving cash flow in the early years of acquisition when the financial burden is at its heaviest, this, allied to other measures, would turn a declining industry into one which within 10 years could contribute £10 billion a year to our balance of payments.

The other prerequisite for reversing our maritime decline is the need to remove the disincentive to employ British seafarers. In his Budget speech my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said:

"I recognise that there is a strategic case for measures to encourage shipping companies to draw their crews from seamen in the United Kingdom, who would be willing and able to serve in time of war."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 173.]

Regrettably, and I believe inadvertently, the only measure that was introduced, clause 43, will do nothing of the sort. It will not reduce the cost of employing British crews; it will harm British companies which employ the two thirds of British seafarers who will not benefit and who will therefore be tempted away from their current employment to serve in deep-sea ships which, given the decline of our own fleet, are likely to be foreign-owned and operated.

In order that the objectives that my right hon. Friend has enunciated may be fulfilled, it is essential that the cost of employing British seafarers be reduced. Merchant seamen should be afforded relief from income tax in a way that enables the employer to retain the earnings which would otherwise be remitted to the Inland Revenue.

What would that cost be? It would be some £30 million in a full year in the short term, but the benefits in training, employment and the security of our nation would undoubtedly be considerable. There are precedents for these measures in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and Greece.

I believe that not to follow such precedents would demonstrate a shortsighted, short-term, blinkered approach which would be uncharacteristic of a Conservative Chancellor. We have seen that, as the upper bands of personal tax are reduced, tax revenues from the same percentile increase. Similarly, more ships and more men paying less will produce more revenue than fewer ships and fewer men paying more. The precedent and the principle are clear.

Some hon. Members may ask what is so special about British shipping that it needs and deserves special assistance. Others may suggest that we should reduce the intervention of other countries which places us at such a disadvantage. That is a fair question and an understandable comment to which I shall endeavour to give a clear answer and response.

What makes British shipping unique is its importance to this nation's wealth and security, allied to the fact that ships, by their nature, are mobile and will seek out the most favourable fiscal and commercial environment.

These measures are not without precedent in Britain. Some hon. Members may remember that companies in enterprise zones have enjoyed such first-year allowance provisions for some years. The Government have been prepared to take action to safeguard other major generators of invisibles, such as the stock exchange, which last year was exempted from stamp duty on paperless share transactions at a cost of some £800 million in a full year.

As for subsidies enjoyed by our competitors, the Government and industry joint working party concluded:

"The prospects for eliminating subsidies in other countries in the near future are not encouraging".

As every hon. Member will understand, that is Ministry-speak for, "By the time it happens—if it happens—there will be no British ships or British seafarers."

An ancestor of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was Arthur Anderson, who founded P and O. With his Shetland ancestry, my right hon. Friend should understand the importance of the sea to this nation. He must know that the country faces the risk of the near-total loss of the United Kingdom-registered fleet. Other countries that share our free market philosophy have

[Mr. Jonathan Sayeed]

decided that it is not a risk that they can afford and have taken remedial action. Their fleets are reviving and beginning to prosper. Unless the Government reach the same conclusions, we shall rue the day that we stood idle and watched our maritime heritage, power and commerce disappear before our eyes.

Over the past 10 years, the British Merchant Navy has declined by 9 per cent. a year—there is only 10 per cent. left. The industry's needs are clear. The palliatives of Government have failed. The early-day motion has made clear the will of the House. It is time for the Government to act as the industry proposes and as the House requires.

7.3 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) makes a powerful case for British merchant shipping with which most of us would agree, as the early-day motion shows. Unfortunately, the Conservative Government will not listen to him. This is another great British industry that has been run down by the right-wing market philosophy of the past 12 years.

The Second Reading debate on the Finance Bill is unusual because it combines a debate on the clauses and a general economic debate on the development of the economy from the presentation of the Budget until now. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury spent most of his speech on economic matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) referred to clause 12. Like many Labour Members, I deplore the increase in VAT to 17·5 per cent. I do so for many reasons. It reduces the local element in local taxation to 11 or 12 per cent. That makes a mockery of local democracy. It creates a "gearing" problem—to use the vogue word—and gives the Government an excuse to maintain capping on local government expenditure.

There is also a central Government problem. I do not wish to indulge in the debate about hypothecation. Clearly this is not strictly hypothecation. It seems that the 2·5 per cent. proceeds on VAT are almost like the judge's salary and the European Community's budget expenditure—a charge on the Consolidated Fund. I do not know how Governments will deal with it and whether it will reduce their flexibility.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said that 17·5 per cent. was too high. We should move to more positive rates of VAT. A single positive rate of about 14 per cent.—even 15 per cent. was too high—could be justified. A rate of 17·5 per cent. falls heavily on many disadvantaged groups, including charities, disabled people and churches. I remember as a Treasury Minister, when the rate was lower, replying to letter after letter about the problem of repairing church roofs. Churches collect considerable amounts to repair church roofs, but then face VAT bills. If we move to higher rates, we must have an intermediate rate between zero and 17·5 per cent.

The Government are attempting to convince people that things are getting better. We had the usual bluster from the Chief Secretary. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor try to put a brave face on matters. We hear about lights at the end of tunnels, corners being turned, bottoming-out and turning points—various clichés are trotted out. They are a sure sign that the Government are not sure of themselves and are not confident about their assertions.

After 12 years of Tory Government, the underlying state of the economy is dire. A few percentage points off the retail prices index and a few percentage points off interest rates—although welcome—will not make much difference to the problems facing the British economy. Over the past 12 years, Britain has become a nation of consumers. The Government have never worried about production. Their philosophy is consumption. Goods must be bought—it does not matter where they come from. The drug must be found—it does not matter who the maker or the pusher is. It does not matter what it costs—it must be paid for.

The best sign of the dire state of our economy remains the balance of payments—not the fact that the Government do not like the state of the economy. There are those, like Conservative Members, who do not want to hear about the balance of payments. As Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) told us year in, year out, from one debate to another, that it did not matter. When eventually it mattered, he said, "It matters only if we cannot finance it." The right hon. Gentleman proceeded to finance it with high interest rates and the consequent recession from which we suffer now.

Devotees of the Samuel Brittan column in the *Financial Times* will have noticed that from week to week the respected writer hankers for a common European currency. One reason is that, as he tells us, the balance of payments figures will completely disappear—like the bits of paper that went down the tube in George Orwell's "1984". The figure may disappear, but the underlying causes will remain. South Dakota and California have a common currency. They do not issue balance of payments figures, but South Dakota is probably the poorest state in the Union and California the richest—and any balance of payments figures that they issued would reflect that. Whether or not such figures are produced, nothing changes.

Over the past 10 years, the Tory culture has been that consumers and consumerism are king. That was brought home to me when I re-read an article in the *Financial Times*, published a day after the latest trade figures were released, under the byline of a Mr. Peter Marsh, who is a member of the paper's economic staff. The headline was: "Trade gap may be start of recovery." I found that strange, but thought that it might be deliberate. The article began: "Britain's current account deficit widened last month," —which was correct—"which is a sign that the country's battered economy may soon begin a recovery." I thought how odd that statement was. I would have said the opposite and that it was a sign of the country's battered economy becoming more battered. I do not blame Mr. Marsh. He is probably a child of the 80s and of Thatcherism and consumerism—under which, if consumption increases, it is thought that the economy improves, and if consumption falls, the economy is battered. For those who hold that belief, it does not matter whether the goods come from Pwllheli, Ashton-under-Lyne, Sheffield, or from abroad—to them, that is a secondary consideration.

The Treasury forecast a £6 billion trade deficit in manufactured goods in the coming year which is half the figure for last year. The Red Book makes it clear that that is only because there is a recession. Otherwise, I suspect

that the deficit would be nearer £12 billion. As interest rates fall again, as apparently they will, the deficit will increase, growing nearer to £12 billion.

Britain cannot call itself an industrial nation any longer. It is a service nation. Britain's percentage share of total EC manufacturing output is down to 15 per cent., lower than France and Italy—which are both of comparable size but without our industrial manufacturing tradition—and substantially lower than Germany, whose share is about 50 per cent.

Consumption is not the only reason for the state of the British economy. This country has many efficient industries, and several have grown more efficient over the past 10 years, but there are not enough of them and Britain cannot simply up production when demand requires, so it is met from abroad.

The problem lies not only with manufacturing industry. Britain's balance of trade deficit in food has doubled over the last 12 years of Conservative government. Last year, the figure was £6 billion, and because demand for food is probably less elastic, it is likely to be the same for the coming year. There was a time when that would not matter, because we could just about cover our food trade deficit with our surplus in manufacturing industry—as we did in 1979. But those days have gone, and I do not expect that we shall see another surplus for at least 10 years.

It is a sad commentary on 12 years of Conservative government that we enter the 1990s with a substantial trade deficit in not only manufactured goods but food, and unable fully to produce all the food that we need to come anywhere near satisfying the demands of the British population.

From 1985 onwards, Britain's trade deficits were masked by its energy surplus which, in 1985, reached a high point of £8 billion. Effectively, it was an oil surplus. It has fallen year by year, and I doubt whether there will be an energy surplus this year, any more than there was last. It has been lost for reasons that we all understand.

Britain already has substantial manufacturing and food trade deficits, and there is a possibility that it will incur an energy deficit, too. The situation in respect of oil will be neutral, one way or another. Britain cannot look forward to the surpluses that it has enjoyed over the past few years. There may be a coal deficit because pit closures may make it necessary to import more coal. The existing small gas deficit may increase as other countries export their product to Britain to break its monopoly, and the French will no doubt be pouring their nuclear-generated electricity into the national grid, as they do already and are entitled to do. As French capacity increases, they will drive down the price to take an even larger share of the British market. We may therefore have an energy trade deficit of anything from £2 billion to £4 billion over the next 10 years.

Britain enters the 1990s with a potential trade deficit of £20 billion in respect of manufactured goods, food and energy. Who will pay for it? As the right hon. Member for Blaby said, if the deficit can be paid for, all will be well. Where are Britain's invisible exports? We found them again last year, when they were valued at about £5 billion, and took the form of interest, profits and dividends. However, that revenue is subject to the vagaries of the market, interest rates, and other factors. Let us not forget the payment that we make to the EC and to what used to be called the British Army of the Rhine. We could still be left with an annual deficit of about £16 billion over the next four or five years.

The service industries cannot cover that deficit, because they are consumers. Nor can property companies, which put up the marvellous buildings and shopping malls that have mushroomed all round the country over the past 10 years. Will the distribution industry, which puts all the foreign goods into those shopping malls, pay for that deficit? Of course not—it is concerned with increasing consumerism. Nor will pension funds pay, because they spend most of their time trying to beat inflation, and they are concerned with consumerism, too.

The City does not contribute very much, despite the fact that it likes to think that it does. Stockbrokers and banks contribute very little to Britain's balance of payments. There is a powerful lobby to persuade the central European bank, which the Liberals love so much, to make its base in London. I do not know why. We already have plenty of banks. There are far too many of them, and another one will not produce anything, or help to reduce Britain's balance of payments deficit.

If the Government look to the future, perhaps they can explain how Britain will pay for the enormous deficits in manufacturing goods, food, and energy that I mentioned. Those deficits will partly be met by invisibles, but the balance will be paid for, if "paid" is the right word, by low growth and high unemployment, interest rates, and inflation. I suggest to the House that an economy that cannot produce is prone to high inflation, as different groups try to get as much as they can and to beat the system because production is not up to it. That will be paid for by cuts in public expenditure and a rundown in welfare services as more and more has to be spent on unemployment and debt repayments as a result of high interest rates.

That is the distressing scenario for Britain in the 1990s unless something drastic is done immediately. The Government cannot do anything about it as they have created the problem. Only a Labour Government can make a start on that difficult task.

7.20 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) for expressing so clearly his opposition to the measures taken in the Budget to reduce the burden on local taxpayers. I believe that he said that it made a mockery of local government to raise such a small proportion of the cost from local taxation. I am also grateful to him because he helped to dispel some of the cloud of confusion left by the remarks of his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett).

The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) criticised two of the ways in which taxes are raised to pay for local government—the uniform business rate and the decision to put an extra 2·5 per cent. on VAT to shift the burden. Their accord on such matters must have brought back fond memories of the halcyon days of the Lib-Lab pact, when a lame duck Labour Government looked to cuckoos in the nest for support.

It is perfectly reasonable for members of Opposition parties to criticise Government measures. However, at the end of the remarks of the hon. Member for Derby, South I was left unclear as to what proportion of the cost of local services she thought should fall on business rate payers. I assume that, if she is critical of the level of the uniform business rate now, she is hinting to the House that it is

[Mr. John Watts]

Labour party policy that a smaller proportion of the cost of local services should be borne by business rates. However, at the end of her speech she was running short of time and was unable to give way to me when I sought to intervene. Perhaps one of her colleagues could clarify that matter now or in the winding-up speech, because it is of considerable importance to businesses and for the economy as a whole.

I should have asked the same question of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed if he were in his place, or of another member of his party if there were a Liberal present in the Chamber, but I suspect that it matters little whether the House and the country know the views of the Liberal party on the appropriate proportion of costs to be borne by business rates. I suspect that, after the next general election, the Liberal Bench will be as empty as it is for our deliberations this evening.

The hon. Member for Derby, South also criticised the decision to increase VAT to reduce the burden of the community charge, and it is necessary to be clear about that. I understand her to be saying that my constituents —whose community charge has been reduced this year from £330 a head to £190—should not have that benefit but should be paying more. I assume that she was arguing, as was the right hon. Member for Llanelli, that it is appropriate for local tax payers to bear a greater proportion of the cost.

If the hon. Member for Derby, South were in her place, no doubt she would swiftly rise and tell me that a Labour Government would not have introduced the community charge in the first place, so the need would not arise. Whatever the nature of the local tax used to raise revenue, its burden falls on the local tax payer, and it is important that my constituents and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends know by the end of this debate what proportion of the cost of local services the Labour party feels should fall on the local domestic taxpayer.

If it is not in favour of that shift—I believe that the hon. Lady said that it would be £4 billion or £5 billion extra without achieving a single teacher—I take it to mean that Labour believes that, if more money is to be made available to local government, it should have been spent on extending services rather than on reducing the burden to the local taxpayer.

How much does the Labour party believe that local taxpayers should bear to pay for the total cost of local services? I believe that the Labour party proposes, as a first step, that we should return to the unreformed domestic rate system. My constituents will know that, in the last year of domestic rates—1989-90—the average rate bill in Slough was £500. They will also know that the increase in precepts and expenditure since then would add another 38 per cent., taking the average to roughly £700.

If the Labour party is against measures which reduce the burden falling on local taxpayers, it is offering my constituents in Slough, as a first step, a return to paying £700 per household on average in domestic rates, compared with £380 in community charge for a couple or, under the proposals of the Secretary of State for the Environment, a council tax of £357 for an average-sized property. I hope that the Labour party will spell that out. If it does, I know which options my constituents will back.

In his opening remarks, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury rightfully took credit on behalf of the Government for having abolished six taxes. No doubt that inspired my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) to suggest another one—capital gains tax—that he thought should be added to the list. He acknowledged that that would be a fairly costly measure to add to this year's Budget—at a cost of £1·4 billion. I doubt whether he will be surprised not to receive a favourable response to his representations this year.

I have another suggestion to put to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench—one that would cost them less, perhaps about £2 million but no more. In 1982, bingo duty was extended to working men's clubs and similar non-profit-making members' clubs and voluntary organisations. Its introduction was to prevent unfair competition with commercial bingo operators and not as a means of raising revenue. Ever since that duty was imposed in 1982, the Working Men's Club and Institutes Union and other clubs which are associated with it through the Committee of Registered Clubs Association —including the British Legion, Liberal clubs, Labour clubs, and, although they are not in CORCA, Conservative clubs—have campaigned for the abolition of that impost.

As the joint chairman of the parliamentary group for non-profit-making members' clubs, I have often been vocal in the Finance Bill Committee in advocating that case. As Murphy's law always applies, it was during one year that I did not serve on that Committee that my right hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), then Financial Secretary, conceded a substantial rise in the threshold at which clubs were required to pay the duty. Perhaps it was not Murphy's law: perhaps it was the absence of my persuasion that led him to do so. I hope that that was not the case, as I would not wish the argument to fail because of my advocacy today.

Raising the threshold was a welcome relief to many clubs which had been on the margin of liability to pay the tax, and the clubs are grateful for that. However, the case for abolition remains as strong as ever. The argument, to put it concisely, is that the original reason for the introduction of the tax—to prevent unfair competition with commercial bingo operators—is no longer valid. When the case was put and accepted in 1989 for the threshold to be raised, no objection was made by the Bingo Association of Great Britain. The association made it very clear that it wished to raise no such objection.

When representations were made earlier this year to Treasury Ministers, the clubs movement also informed the Bingo Association of Great Britain what it intended to do and asked whether it had any objections. In reply, the association wrote to Customs and Excise and said:

> "We have been requested not to oppose the abolition of this duty for the clubs, and we want to make it clear that we do not want to be cited as an objector to this change and in no way do we wish to be seen at this stage as an adverse influence on the CIU's case."

That should put to bed once and for all any suggestion that the maintenance of this duty is justifiable because of the need to protect commercial operators from unfair competition. If the trade body of the commercial bingo operators does not seek to argue that case, I do not think that Customs and Excise or the Treasury should seek to argue it any further on its behalf.

There is a powerful reason why abolition of the duty is required for non-profit-making members' clubs—and not merely further increases in the threshold at which they have to pay tax. The problem is that even those clubs that do not have to pay tax need to maintain all the records that would be required if they were paying tax in order to be able to prove to Customs and Excise that they are not liable to pay it.

The effect of this on the literally thousands of volunteers who run these clubs up and down the country is a very considerable additional work load. It is imposed not on people who are paid to do the job but on volunteers from among our constituents, who give of their free time to serve these clubs that play such an important role in the life of our local communities. Whatever increases in the threshold may be made from time to time, that administrative burden continues to fall on all clubs where bingo is ever played.

I urge my colleagues on the Treasury Bench, therefore, to look closely at the submission that has been made and to add bingo duty for non-profit-making members' clubs to the roll of honour of unnecessary and unhappy taxes that the Government have so far succeeded in abolishing.

7.33 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): A few hundred yards from where I live in Hackney lies Ridley road market, a famous east end market. We can get everything at Ridley road—fruit, veg, clothes, freshly baked bagels, West Indian sugar cane. We also have our share of con men. I put it to the House that this country's economy is being run by a bunch of little better than con men. Boring and grey suited they may be, but they have standards of honesty and probity that would embarrass the average east end street trader.

As a member of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, under the distinguished chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), I have had the opportunity to observe this Government's dishonesty at first hand. The chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Worthing has been so scrupulously honest that the members of the Committee are worried that his honesty may stand in the way of him becoming Sir Terence.

I wish to point to three of the most recent Government cons that provide the background to the Finance Bill. They are the bogus nature of the official statistics; the Government's misleading claims about the consequences of the VAT switch; and finally, and sadly, the way that they have conned innocent right-wingers in their own party about Europe. I shall come later to the touching plight of these innocent, blameless, harmless little Englanders and right-wingers. First, let me deal with the bogus Government statistics.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has been agonising for some time about Government forecasts. In 1988, we said that there were a number of serious doubts about autumn statement forecasts. At first, we thought that it was just the statistics, so we said, again in 1988, that the Treasury's ability to come to any rigorous judgment about the economy is now severely circumscribed by the unsatisfactory state of the official statistics. In 1989, we pleaded with the Government to take urgent action to improve the quality and reliability of official statistics. In 1990, we said that margins of error of the magnitude in the Government's forecasts present a serious problem in relation to the management of the economy.

All along, we thought that the problem with the Government's forecasts was merely the statistics, but enter, in 1991, at one of our sessions of evidence on the subject, Mr. C. J. Mowl—grade 3, economic forecasts and analysis, Treasury. Our Chairman put to Mr. Mowl what I believe he imagined to be a helpful question. He said:

"The Shadow Chancellor on the floor of the House has made considerable reference to what he describes as 'the Chancellor's forecasts' and indeed 'the Chancellor's previous forecasts'. Can you tell us to what extent, if any extent, Ministers have been responsible for any of the figures?"

Mr. Mowl blinked, exposed as he was to the unaccustomed sunlight, and burbled. He talked about the confidentiality of advice to Ministers, about a large element of judgment and about the process of discussion. Finally, he said:

"The forecast produced can be described as both the Treasury forecast and the Chancellor's forecast and the Government's forecast. It is a collective view."

That is strange wording. The right hon. Member for Worthing tried again. He said:

"But my previous understanding was that when the official forecast is produced and published Ministers do not look at a particular figure."

He asked whether he was correct. He went on to say:

"It certainly used to be the position. With the Red Books which I was responsible for issuing, I certainly would not have dreamt of altering any of the official forecasts."

The Treasury officials hummed and hah-ed, but it was clear from that session of evidence that what is happening with the Government forecast is that the judgment of Ministers with no economic background is being used to tamper with the statistics.

That is the basis for the recommendation in our report, which has been largely overlooked, that the Treasury should make full forecasts four times a year, and that the results should not be modified by Ministers. The reason why the forecasts have been so consistently out is that the statistics have been modified by Ministers—in my view, with political aims in mind. That is why the forecasts systematically failed to spot the recession, why they systematically underestimated its seriousness and why they are consistently wrong about inflation. There is one common factor in the errors in the forecasts: they are always in favour of the Government.

Mr. Higgins: The hon. Lady is sliding from saying whether there is any political input in the forecasts into saying whether there is any political input in the statistics. It is important to make that distinction. My clear understanding, as we have heard frequently in evidence from the head of the Central Statistical Office, is that there is no question whatsoever of Ministers altering the statistics in any way. It is the case, as we understand it, that there may be to some extent a change in the forecasts, but that has happened under the Governments of all political parties in recent years, although it used not to happen some years ago.

Ms. Abbott: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for clarifying my point. I am not suggesting that there has been political interference in the statistics; I am stating that it has been proven that there has been political interference in the forecasts. They are forecasts that have been written on the back of an envelope, and they are not worth the paper on which they are written. The errors in

[Ms. Abbott]

those forecasts are consistently in favour of the Government. Year by year, the credibility of those inaccurate and misleading forecasts slides down the drain.

The second great con of the Government's economic thinking which is enshrined in the Finance Bill is that switching a proportion of the poll tax to an increase in VAT will hit the rich harder than the poor. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury was reduced to quoting *Guardian* editorials to support that proposition, but *Guardian* editorials can be wrong. In the 1980s, *Guardian* editorials supported the SDP, and where is that party now?

Although people who have millions of pounds to spend will pay more in VAT than people who have to watch every penny, as most of my constituents do, the Government's own statistics show that, proportionately, VAT hits the poor harder than the rich. The Government's statistical service publication "Economic Trends" conclusively gives the lie to the bogus claims that we heard from the Chief Secretary. It shows that, as a proportion of disposable income, VAT takes much more from the poor than from the rich—almost twice as much. On average VAT takes about 7·3 per cent. of an average person's disposable income.

Mr. Mans: Bearing in mind what she says, am I to assume that the hon. Lady would like VAT reduced?

Ms. Abbott: My purpose this evening is not to give a comprehensive analysis of the Government's economic errors, but merely to point out three particular spivvy bogus cons that have been put forward by the Treasury. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall continue with my speech, as I am aware that many other hon. Members wish to speak.

The Government's publication "Economic Trends" points out that the bottom 10 per cent. of the population, the poorest of the poor, who are well represented in my constituency of Hackney, the poorest constituency in the country, pay 9·2 per cent. of their disposable income in VAT. However, the richest 10 per cent., who are represented by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and by the right hon. Member for Worthing, pay only 5·6 per cent. of their disposable income in VAT. Proportionately, VAT takes almost twice as much from the disposable income of the poor as it does from that of the rich. The reason is obvious. Just like the poll tax, VAT takes no account of income. In swapping part of the poll tax for a hike in VAT, the Government have simply swapped one flat-rate tax for another.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): The figures that the hon. Lady has used need to be explained properly, because they do not add up. What she says about the people at the top of the income scale is true, because rich people save much more of their income. However, what she says about the rest of the income scale is not true, because the income and expenditure figures on which those statistics are based are taken from the family expenditure survey, in which people say that they spend much more than they earn. Their spending figures are based on a figure about 40 per cent. higher than what they declare as their income, so if one is taken as a percentage of the other, the figure is bound to be distorted. If the hon. Lady examines the basis of that, she will find that it is true and that the family expenditure survey shows that people in the bottom two deciles of income have expenditure 40 per cent. higher than their incomes.

Ms. Abbott: I was talking not about expenditure but about disposable income. What I said about disposable income can be found in the text of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee report on the Budget. Everyone pays the same VAT on a packet of cigarettes or children's sweets, whether they are the Duke of Westminster or his dustman. Despite the exemptions and the zero ratings, according to the Government's own publication, VAT hits the poor harder than the rich. In economic jargon, VAT is less regressive than the late unlamented poll tax, but to say that VAT hits the poor less is like saying that being in prison is less inconvenient than being hanged. It is a regressive tax if one considers income. *[Laughter.]* Conservative Members may giggle, but at a time of rising unemployment, they are more concerned about taxes on car phones than the plight of the people of this country. People will take note of that and express their opinions in the next general election.

I would not like to leave the subject of the VAT switch without mentioning the cost of the poll tax. There has been a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing across the Floor of the House about what the poll tax has cost. Let me put on record the Treasury's own figures. The poll tax has cost British taxpayers £370 million in preparation costs, and the cost of collecting the poll tax over and above what it would have cost to collect the rates is £302 million. Those figures were not cooked up by the Labour party in Walworth road: they are the Treasury's own figures. The poll tax has cost the people of Britain unnecessary expenditure in the region of £672 million. How many nurses at Guy's or operations in Bradford could that have funded? That is what the Government's political spite and economic adventurism have cost the country.

The third economic fraud that the Government have perpetrated on the British people concerns Europe. They are trying to con not only the people and the Treasury and Civil Service Committee but their own little Englander, "wogs begin at Calais" right-wingers, who have had the wool pulled over their eyes. The Select Committee recently visited Brussels to discuss European matters and economic and monetary union. Everyone in Europe except a few neanderthal right-wingers on the Conservative Back Benches knows that economic and monetary union is a moving train and Britain is most firmly on it.

The opinion in Brussels is that there will be a single European currency by the year 2000. There is no real sign that the Government are trying to derail that process. British people are being backed into a single European currency by a Government who wish to avoid debate because they wish to avoid the venom of their own Back Benchers.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): The hon. Lady and I are both members of the Treasury Select Committee, and I enjoyed the trip to Brussels. Given what she says she saw at the European Commission, does she favour a single European currency?

Ms. Abbott: I do not claim to have the economic expertise of many Conservative Members; I claim merely to be a proponent of honesty and openness in government. My charge is that the Government are dishonest and are

not open about the progress towards economic and monetary union because they do not wish to tangle with the neanderthals on their own Back Benches.

Finally, the media tell us that the Government consist of quiet, grey, boring men. I put it to the House that they are quiet, grey, boring con men. Their figures are bogus, their forecasts are bogus and, above all, their claims of economic competence are bogus. My constituents are being crucified by a combination of high interest rates, record unemployment and record bankruptcies, yet Conservative Members are concerned only with a tax on car phones.

The Government have misled the country with talk of a short, shallow recession, but the Prime Minister's hold on power will prove short and shallow as soon as there is a general election—which, for the good of the country, cannot come too soon. The country has had enough of grey-suited con men. They would be chased out of Ridley road market, and they should be chased out of power.

7.49 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I must tell that doughty lady, the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott), that honesty in politics includes declaring where one stands on the fundamental issues of the day. It is not enough merely to analyse, perhaps mistakenly, the position as one perceives it. One must tell the House whether one is in favour of the moving train of economic and monetary union. It also helps to have a clear idea of where the Labour party stands on VAT, local taxation and so on. We have had no convincing answers on any of those matters today.

I want to give my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary some words of comfort about the progress of economic recovery. From several sectors, my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench have received a buffeting about the state of the economy and whether any recovery is under way. Right hon. and hon. Members know very well that the core town of my constituency has, from the mid-1980s, been one of the principal boom towns. However, by early autumn last year, new investment had virtually ground to a halt. The last new capital construction programmes started in October 1990 and there was nothing until February 1991. Since then, there has been a growing volume of new factory starts and new capital investment for the service industry and the manufacturing industry. There has been new inward investment into the United Kingdom.

I am not saying that that is typical of the country as a whole. My constituency was always going to be the last to be hit by the recession and the first to emerge from it and there are clear signs that it is now beginning to emerge. Of course, there has been a rise in unemployment and I have no doubt that there will be some further bad news on employment. However, as I drive around my constituency several times each week, I see new capital investment in plant and machinery and clear signs that genuine job creation is under way again. It is extremely likely that the surge of economic activity that has been taking place during the spring will spread into my neighbouring constituency, that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and much further afield.

I welcome the liberalisation of the tax regime for friendly societies. A great deal has been said in Standing Committee and in the Chamber about friendly societies. I welcome the fact that the Government have made a modest change to the tax regime and I look forward to the introduction—I hope as soon as possible in the next Session—of the much wider range of reforms for friendly societies that has been envisaged since the consultation paper of about two years ago. I know that good progress is under way.

In his speech in the Budget debate, which was unfortunately wrecked by his unnecessary and gratuitous last two paragraphs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) said some interesting things about the structure of VAT. The thrust of his remarks was that the two rates of VAT—zero and 17·5 per cent.—cover too wide a band. Those comments have been echoed by the right hon. Members for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). The comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby about the current structure of VAT were wise. I believe that there should be other rates. The system that has existed since 1972, of which my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) was the midwife if not the father, has served its time. Given the changing conditions and changing European circumstances, we shall have to have a much more fundamental look at different rates of VAT.

The House knows of my interest over a number of years in the village hall movement. In the past, the Government have been helpful, but there is no doubt that this year they are not being as helpful as they have been because of the increase in VAT from 15 to 17·5 per cent. That affects all charities, but I choose to put my remarks in the context of village halls because of my interest in them.

I want to reinforce the remarks made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) about the bloodstock industry. There is no doubt that unless some changes are made to the VAT regime, the bloodstock industry, which is important for exports and employment, will find itself seriously disadvantaged as compared to France and Ireland, which are our natural competitors in that industry. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has in her constituency one of the foremost studs in the world in which stands, among others, the great stallion Nashwan. She will be aware from her constituency experience of how important the bloodstock industry can be.

Much has been said about economic forecasts. I commend to right hon. and hon. Members a different source of forecast from those quoted this evening. I suspect that not enough right hon. and hon. Members read *The Racing Post*. It has a much better record of forecasting than many of the highly paid research institutes and other bodies which are constantly telling us what might be happening in the economy in the future. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has entered the Chamber. I hope that she will take time to study a page in *The Racing Post* today which deals with VAT and bloodstock. As I have said, it is an important matter. I shall not go into detail but the learned commentator, Mr. Wright, analyses carefully and precisely how the bloodstock industry will be greatly disadvantaged by the new regime that will come into operation in 1993 unless my hon. Friend the Minister of State and representatives of the bloodstock industry are able to find a satisfactory way to ensure that this important industry, dealing with high quality stock, is not disadvantaged.

One sector of the economy is extremely important for wealth creation. I was interested in the speech made by my

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hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) in which he advocated the abolition of capital gains tax. He put it in the context of the great difficulty facing British people in acquiring disposable wealth. He said that he was a famous exception to the rule that it is virtually impossible in this country for people with nothing to create wealth. That is in contrast to what might happen in the United States.

In the happy days of old, when Lord Rees of Goytre was the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, he pointed to the distinguished record of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby in abolishing taxes and asked Conservative Members which taxes they would like to see abolished. I have never been in any doubt that my answer is income tax. The prospect of income tax being abolished is even more remote than the prospect of capital gains tax being abolished. However, I must bear in mind that it was my political hero, the younger Pitt, who introduced the awful income tax, and we have had to live with it ever since.

I should like to see that abolition not only of income tax and capital gains tax but of inheritance tax, which has a great impact on family businesses. Family enterprises and businesses are responsible for an important part of wealth creation. No economy will succeed without a thriving family business sector. Some of the most successful European economies have no large industry but have such a thriving sector.

Immense efforts have been made in the past decade to increase small and medium businesses, which include family businesses. The evidence shows that, under the Government, no more family businesses have been created than there were in 1979—we must do more to correct that —because the fiscal regime that they face, despite the improvements that have been made since 1979, is remarkably unattractive. Too much economic policy is aimed at quoted companies, but 52 per cent. of the population is employed by the unquoted sector.

The inheritance tax regime is extraordinarily unattractive to the unquoted sector. In Britain, inheritance tax is 40 per cent., compared with an average top rate of 27·5 per cent. in 16 other European countries. The British threshold is £128,000, which is lower than in any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country, apart from Denmark, Greece and Norway. The British higher rate is levied on smaller estates than in virtually every other industrialised country. In Germany, the rate of 35 per cent., which of course is lower than the British rate, is not levied on an estate worth less than DM100 million. At DM2·95 to the pound, that is £34 million, or 265 times as much as the British rate.

Inheritance tax almost always must be paid from the active assets of the company. In other words, the company has to be sold, and it is usually sold not to other family businesses but to quoted companies, which often extinguish competition rather than enhance the company's assets.

One of the advantages of family businesses is that they tend to take a long-term view rather than the short-term view of reacting to today's share price and tomorrow's profit forecast. Often, those profit forecasts are made by unreliable journals that are produced at high cost rather than more reliable journals such as *The Racing Post*. Hon. Members will learn much by turning their attention to real professional forecasters rather than the highly paid people who produce bogus forecasts.

I make a plea that the Government reconsider the tax regime for unquoted companies. This is a matter of much importance. If inheritance tax cannot be abolished, I should prefer the introduction of 100 per cent. business property relief. Such relief should apply to the commercial sector and could be extended to farms. The annual cost would be not the £2 million that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) mentioned in relation to bingo, but £20 million, as suggested by Treasury Ministers. The incentive for wealth creation and for the opportunities that even the right hon. Member for Llanelli mentioned would be much enhanced. I ask Treasury Ministers, please, to think again because much more can be done. The threshold for estate inheritance tax has not been fully indexed.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the heirs to a company—who are saddled with a substantial inheritance tax burden—decide not to sell the company, they must invariably borrow against the assets of the company, thereby burdening it with substantial debt and increasing its future risks? That burden of debt effectively becomes a charge on the company's cash flow. Resources that might otherwise be available for business investment are channelled through the Inland Revenue to Government expenditure. Is not that a most economically destructive process?

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) is correct.

My final point relates to employee share ownership plans. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), who has played a considerable part in ESOPs, is here. ESOPs are excellent news for quoted companies or for unquoted companies that intend to become quoted, but they hold no attraction for the long-term family business. Many long-term family businesses would like to be able to offer their employees incentives, but there is an inherent contradiction between their need to keep the share valuation low and the desire of employees to increase it. I am not trying to undermine what my hon. Friend the Member for Esher has been working for, which has been accepted by Treasury Ministers in the past two years. Means to enable employees of long-term family businesses to have share participation schemes that do not undermine the fundamental balance of a company that, because of inheritance tax, wishes to keep the value of its shares to the minimum have been suggested to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. A gap has opened up in employee share participation schemes for one important sector of the economy, and I ask my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to resolve it as quickly as possible.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House of the earlier appeal for brief speeches.

8.8 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On 4 April, the people of Neath delivered their verdict on the Budget and the Finance Bill. The Conservative party's vote collapsed and

its candidate barely saved his deposit. There is contempt in my constituency for the incompetence and arrogance of the policies of the Chancellor and of the previous Prime Minister.

People are most offended by the dreadful short-termism of the Government—the short-termism of a Chancellor as he rearranges the deckchairs while the ship of state sinks beneath the economic seas. The short-termism of the United Kingdom's financial system means that share levels and dividends soar while manufacturing investment collapses. Yet again, British industry trails behind that of our economic competitors.

The success that has been claimed by the Government is a mirage. The British economy is committing hara-kiri. Since 1979, consumption has increased by 40 per cent. after allowing for inflation, but the production of the British industries that produce those consumer goods has increased by only 7·8 per cent. In other words, our consumption has increased five times more than the production of our consumer industries.

At the same time, consumer credit has soared to a staggering £52 billion, which is five times what it was in 1979. Under a Government who preach good housekeeping, it is extraordinary to find that staggering burden of personal debt. Equally astonishing is the amount of corporate debt, which has now reached £27 billion, much of it financing the avaricious thirst for dividends and the free-loading of company directors which characterises our industry today. In money terms, dividends have tripled since 1979 while investment has barely remained stagnant. This is a society living on tick, led by a Government living on borrowed time.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) described so graphically, our trade position is catastrophic. The report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee warned that any recovery from the current recession, whenever it occurs, will turn our huge current account deficit into a mega deficit as Britain's insatiable appetite for imports is let rip.

The people of south Wales cannot understand the crazy logic of a Government who are determined to close every coal pit in south Wales while imports soar to record levels, with 15 million tonnes of coal being imported every year. That has a dreadful impact on our balance of payments deficit and a huge social cost in terms of unemployment and its effect on the communities round those pits. That strategy makes sense only to yuppie accountants in the City of London, not to anybody living in Wales. We in Wales look with amazement at the brazen cheek of Ministers who spend their time in the House claiming success while the real economy collapses around our communities. As the Welsh Chamber of Commerce reported only last week, the recession in Wales is deepening, not only in the manufacturing sector where employment has fallen by over 20 per cent. since 1979, but in the flagship of this Government's economic policy, the service sector. We have not only had record closures and business failures, but the Confederation of British Industry in Wales reports that two out of three firms are currently working below capacity. That is some recovery from the recession.

The Government are washing their hands of Welsh industry, having cut the real value of regional preferential assistance to Wales by 57 per cent. since the early 1980s. That has happened at the very time when regional investment and support such as long-term loan finance and the backing for research and development were urgently needed to boost our industry to prepare it for the cold winds of European competition.

The local economy of Neath has been shattered. Unemployment is up 33 per cent. on a year ago. The figure for March 1991 was 2,400, but, according to the unemployment unit, the real figure is probably 3,612 because the unit estimates the number of people out of work on the pre-1982 basis—that is, on the basis used before the Government started fiddling the official unemployment figures. That means desperation for the families that have been put out of work. There is also desperation for those seeking work and who are offered jobs paying £80 or £90 a week, which is barely enough to raise them above the standard of living of the many people who have to subsist on benefits. If the Chancellor could not live on £80 or £90 per week, how can he expect my constituents in Neath to take jobs that provide that level of income? Why do not the Government support a statutory minimum wage such as exists in many of our competitor countries in Europe, which are far more successful economically than we are?

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman has just mentioned a minimum wage. Would the introduction of a minimum wage increase or decrease unemployment in his constituency?

Mr. Hain: I rely on the analysis of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, which shows that the Labour party's policy for a statutory minimum wage would increase unemployment by perhaps 4,000, which is almost insignificant, but even that——

Mr. Mans: Would it increase unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency by 4,000?

Mr. Hain: Be sensible. It would increase unemployment by 4,000 across the country. I repeat that comparable European countries that have a statutory minimum wage are far more successful than we are.

Neath borough council has intervened in a way that would not attract the Government's approval. It has established five factory sites with starter units. Until recently, there have been long waiting lists for the starter units, which have proved successful, but 29 of the 134 units are now empty. That is an indictment of the Government's policy.

Unemployment is increasing across Wales and has now broken the 100,000 barrier. On 16 May, when the voters of Monmouth go to the polls, that increase in unemployment will again be at a record level and I am confident that those voters will exhibit their protest against the Government's policies by returning a Labour Member of Parliament. Every working day in Wales, four struggling small businesses go to the wall. The number of employment training places in west Wales has been halved during the past year. Young people and women returners who urgently need training if they are to get decent jobs now face a hopeless situation. I recently visited Kenyons, a successful company in the town of Pontardawe making refrigeration equipment which it exports successfully. Its managing director described the frustration that it faces because it wants to train people and has places for them, yet its funding has been reduced because of the Government's cuts in employment training. That is what

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is happening at a time when our skills base is collapsing. Apprenticeships are no longer advertised in south Wales on their previous scale.

In addition, our infrastructure is decaying. How can the Government talk about wanting to make further cuts in income tax when they cannot invest in decent roads? There is a missing link in my constituency between Aberdulais and Glyn-neath because the A465 has not been built and there are no plans to build it despite the fact that it would be a much-needed improvement to the local infrastructure and would therefore increase employment opportunities. How can the Government claim to support local industry in Wales when they are unwilling to fund the infrastructure investment in transport which is so desperately needed?

That is the dreadful impact of the Government's policies, but they also have tragic domestic effects. In 1990, actions at Neath county court for mortgage repossessions increased by 45 per cent. from 276 to 401, causing misery to local families. Across the country, one in five people now lives in poverty, which is a higher proportion than in any other European Community country. The 25p increase in child benefit for the second, third and fourth children in a family which is proposed in the Bill is, frankly, insulting. It will not buy more than a packet of crisps. Many of my constituents have said that they feel like sending a packet of crisps a week to the Chancellor to show the contempt with which they view that child benefit increase. The failure to uprate child benefit fully in line with the retail prices index has robbed families in Wales of a total of £48·19 million. That is the sum of money that the Government owe families in Wales and we expect them to repay it.

VAT has already been mentioned and I read an interesting exchange in the Select Committee's report involving my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott). People in Neath who are on low incomes are hit harder than are rich people by VAT. That fact is borne out in the Government's figures in "Economic Trends" for March 1991 which show that the poorest households pay 11·5 per cent. of their disposable income in VAT compared with the richest which pay half—6·2 per cent. As disposable income in Wales is much lower than the average across the country, people in south Wales have been hit hardest by the increase in VAT, especially those in the valleys in Neath.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that an acceptable way to solve the problems was to put extra duty on petrol and especially on leaded petrol. I understand that argument and I sympathise with him from a green point of view. However, families in the valleys and especially in Neath cannot rely on public transport because there are hardly any buses—the service has been cut to ribbons by Government deregulation and by cuts in local authority provision. They rely on cars and have therefore been hit especially hard by the increases in petrol prices and in VAT.

I wish to deal with tax cuts. In the infamous Budget of 1988 there were tax cuts for the rich made by a Chancellor who was then called "unassailable" and who is now unmentionable. According to the Treasury's own figures, the average earner in Neath has benefited since 1988 from a reduction of only £150 in his or her income tax, whereas over that same period a Minister has benefited from a reduction of £2,540. Those figures give the lie to claims about income tax cuts—they were for the rich.

In my constituency old-age pensioners who may be surviving on a small miner's pension may receive an increase in their pensions, but it is then taken away through an increase in income tax. By every measure, the Government's claims of success are a failure or a fraud and the sooner the Government go to the country so that we can elect a Labour Government to build a strong and modern economy, the better.

8.21 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The speech of the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) underlines—or perhaps defines—the meaning of the saying that economics is a dismal science. His speech was dismal from beginning to end and it was not even accurate when he tried to deal with serious issues.

The hon. Gentleman has clearly not read the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which is explicit about the effects of VAT. Paragraphs 95 to 102, which are worth reading, include the comment:

"As VAT is a tax on expenditure, it is more appropriate to assess its progressivity in relation to expenditure rather than income. On that basis, VAT is clearly progressive".

Ms. Abbott *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: I am just warming up. I shall willingly give way if I may be allowed to finish my paragraph.

The Opposition disapprove of the community charge, but even on their terms, and on the basis of indirect tax where there is an element that could be regressive, VAT is clearly less regressive than the proportion of the community charge—the £140—that has been reduced by transfer to VAT. Therefore, as the Select Committee's report states——

Mr. Battle *rose*——

Ms. Abbott *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: I shall give way to the hon. Lady.

Ms. Abbott: The hon. Gentleman has made my point, but it bears repetition. Considered as a proportion of disposable income, VAT is clearly regressive.

Mr. Taylor: I said that the community charge to which the Opposition are opposed is more regressive even on that basis, as the Select Committee's report notes. VAT is an expenditure tax and in expenditure terms it is progressive.

The hon. Member for Neath mentioned a minimum wage. If the Labour party wishes to talk seriously, rather than making party propaganda, about a minimum wage, they should state what its impact would be on British industry and on services within the economy, such as the health service. The introduction of a minimum wage in the health service could cost up to £500 million. Nearly 18 hospitals a year would have to close to fund that proposal. If we are talking about economic difficulties, we should bear in mind that a Labour Government would grind British industry into ruination if they imposed costs that it could never hope to recoup in the market place. They would also severely damage our public services.

The Labour party talks happily about raising taxation without assessing what the buoyancy of the tax would be at the higher levels. It can give no firm idea about how it would fund its programme. In an interview on television

on Sunday, the Leader of the Opposition made it clear that in key areas such as the national health service there would be no more cash.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) is now in her seat. I am sure that when the reports of the debate are read, it will not be our speeches that are noted, but the hunt for the Norfolk stud that my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) so eloquently launched, and information about the relief that might be available. The importance of that to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West will occupy the long weekends to come.

I had intended to launch an attack on a friend of mine, Professor Tim Congdon, but I was disarmed by his invitation to his 40th birthday party, which is taking place now and where I should be happy to be. However, I must take him to task for being a co-signatory of a recent letter to *The Times* which criticised Government policy on the exchange rate mechanism. In rather panic-stricken terms, the letter urged a sudden reduction in interest rates regardless of what had happened to the exchange rate. The letter has not stood the test of time, even though it appeared only a matter of weeks ago.

It is significant that this evening no one has queried the ERM, the rate at which we entered or the fact that it has introduced some stability into business relationships and exports pricing; nor has anyone queried the fact that entry into the ERM has had a genuine impact as a discipline to reduce inflation. It is also significant that the National Westminster bank's leaflet, "UK Economic Outlook", which is dated 19 April 1991, states:

> "Entry into the ERM can now be seen clearly to be a success, and very few in industry and commerce would wish us to change that policy . . . There have been no significant or serious complaints about the pound being over-valued against continental currencies."

It is heartening when we get such information from economists in the City. We know that the Government were right to take us into the ERM in October last year. Despite the cavilling of Opposition Front Bench spokesmen about the rate at which we entered and about other aspects of our entry, they welcome the overall idea.

The Government's policy was correct and those of us who supported our entry have been justified in our assertion that within the mechanism, for any fall in inflation, there would be the possibility of a faster fall in interest rates than would otherwise be the case. That is because the deflationary worry that has always been created for holders of sterling is gradually removed as the Government's firm commitment to hold to the exchange rate discipline has been realised. In time, that would enable the differential margin between interest rates here and those in Germany to narrow. As it narrows, British interest rates will fall disproportionately faster and could drop well below 10 per cent., depending on how far inflation falls. Some forecasts are of a headline rate of inflation of below 4 per cent. this year. That prospect is important for British industry because inflation creates difficulties for British industry. A 1 per cent. fall in the rate of inflation could well save British industry up to £5 billion, according to figures issued by the CBI.

The Government's thrust to bear down on inflation, which is reinforced in the Budget, is absolutely correct. Given that the exchange rate mechanism is a vital discipline in achieving that objective, the Government were absolutely right to enter it and correct not to panic over the past few months in the face of advice from my friends like Professor Congdon.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): The hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) has acclaimed the Government's entry into the exchange rate mechanism for reducing interest rates and inflation. Why did the Government not take advice from the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), who recommended entry to the ERM three years earlier? Why did the Government not do that then if it is the criterion for bringing the Government on to a more even economic level?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Member has made a good intervention. I have always believed that we should have entered the exchange rate mechanism earlier and my view in that respect is on the record. However, that is not the point. We are not dealing with theory, we are dealing with the real world. The Government took the initiative last October. Sadly for the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Buckley), those on the Opposition Front Bench decided that, although in theory they were in favour of joining the ERM, they did not like the discipline. They wanted us to enter at a much lower level. That would have stored up inflation because, if we had dropped in at too low a central rate, we all know that a depreciating pound imports inflation into our economy. I admit that I have been a long-term believer in the ERM discipline.

There are many aspects to the Budget, and I support the overall thrust of bearing down on inflation which it enshrines. When we consider the Finance Bill, we will consider detailed measures. I want to pay tribute to the Government for the measures that have been introduced to help industry and it is to the Government's credit that they have tried to meet some of industry's worries about cash flow. The changes in corporation tax treatment and rates have been welcomed by industry. Smaller businesses are grateful for the changes in corporation tax, VAT and PAYE which apply to them and those changes will be a significant encouragement.

However, I want to make a point about industry not to the Government, but to the banks. I am perturbed by stories that I am beginning to hear from people in business. Although companies are grateful for some of the Government's reliefs and for recognition of their cash flow problems, there are signs that the banks are beginning to try to restore their profit accounts by applying higher than necessary premiums over base rate, particularly for smaller companies that are borrowing. I want to draw attention to that fact publicly, because it is a worrying development.

The banks were charging 2 per cent. or 2·5 per cent. over base rate for smaller corporate clients. I hear now that they are beginning to charge much in excess of that. That means that the benefits of the fall in interest rates are not necessarily being passed through to smaller companies with the desirable speed. Given that the Government are doing their bit to control the economy for the benefit of business, the banks have a duty to take a more long-term view. I would welcome some banks stating publicly that they are not trying to restore their profit and loss accounts at the expense of British industry.

An important objective of the Budget lies in the pattern of diversification of private investment. In this country there has in the past been a welcome priority in personal

[Mr. Taylor]

investment on housing. I am in no way against a high proportion of personal investment in private housing which people are proud to own. Sixty-seven per cent. of the population now own their own house, and that is a significant percentage. Although it is socially welcome that people own their own houses, that seems to store up a resistance to the problems of inflation. If there is a disproportionate interest in house prices, there is a disproportionate interest in inflation. Therefore, I welcome the Government's realisation that the traditional tax relief for house purchases may need to be reviewed. There is a small, but welcome, start in removing relief on mortgages at the top rate.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): What next?

Mr. Taylor: I believe that capital gains tax is too high; my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) made that point most strongly. One of the big distortions in capital gains tax is the fact that one's house is almost uniquely free of capital gains tax. In removing that relief, which I am not advocating—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] I am sensitive to political winds just like Opposition Members. However, some matters must be considered closely and it might be time to consider ways of assisting other forms of investment through the tax system to run more equally alongside housing.

I have been a long-term advocate of employee share ownership. That is a natural extension of people's interests in assets. What could be more in their interests than an asset in the company for which they work? My hon. Friend the Member for Corby was kind enough to say that I had worked on this point for some time. I believe that it is an important thrust of Government to enable everyone to have access to capital and the income that derives from the ownership of capital. Employee share ownership is a vital and necessary part of that and I do not believe that we have even begun to see the long-term implications of such ownership.

I welcome the measures in the Budget and the incentive for management to have all employee share schemes in place. I can see many implications for company personal equity plan schemes and I welcome them. By themselves those measures are just the start of the revolution. I hope that we will go much farther and in Committee I will want to consider the more boring and technical matters which hold back the development of employee share ownership.

The widening of the access to capital is very important. The Government have shown that they are prepared to act and that there should be a shift in traditional reliefs for homes and pensions into new forms of private investment, so that the savings can be properly balanced and perhaps be more resistant to inflationary factors that so often afflict this country as soon as we appear to be releasing tight monetary policies that are necessary to force down inflation. Having succeeded in forcing inflation down, we do not want to find that it is pushed upwards again simply because people are borrowing against their houses as happened in 1987 and 1988.

I believe that many other technical factors will be raised in Committee. I was going to refer in detail to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby about employee share ownership, but I will save that for another time.

Mr. Buckley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: I am conscious of the time, and I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, so I shall not do so again.

There is an omission from the Budget, and that is the problem that is afflicting the Lloyd's insurance market. That problem is of considerable importance because Lloyd's is a major invisible export earner. It is important also because many of the names that are the bedrock of Lloyd's are facing cash calls on current years. I have no interest to declare. I am not a member or a name of Lloyd's, but I am concerned about the implications for that institution.

Perhaps we should consider some form of tax relief on current-year cash calls, and possibly even enabling members of Lloyd's, and the syndicates in particular, to build up tax deductible catastrophe reserves, even if it means that the special reserves that currently exist are removed as a quid pro quo. I ask Treasury Ministers to consider that point because I am concerned that we are at the beginning of a crisis. If that crisis afflicts Lloyd's, one of the great British industries could be seriously damaged, and competition would mean that business would go elsewhere.

Overall, it is an excellent Budget which pushes forward the battle against inflation and provides incentives for people who wish to get access to capital. I look forward to serving on the Committee.

8.40 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I welcome the opportunity of participating in this debate, not least because it gives the Financial Secretary an opportunity to reply to some of the points that I made on the Budget. I am relieved that he is present, because, although the Minister of State took notes on the previous occasion, he must have had difficulty reading her notes, because he did not reply to the points that I raised. I wish especially to obtain some information on the proposed foundation on sports and arts. Anybody who listened to the Chancellor's speech on 19 March would reasonably assume that such a measure would be included in the Bill. The Chancellor said:

"On the understanding that all the main pools companies agree to participate and that the full amount would be passed on to a new trust established on satisfactory terms, I would be willing to reduce pool betting duty a final time—from 40 per cent. to 37½ per cent.—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 175.]

However, in the Bill there is no mention of a reduction of pool betting duty. The Financial Secretary must come clean and tell the House why that is the case. Is it because two of the three main pools companies have not decided to participate? Is it that the Government have failed to arrive at satisfactory terms for the proposed new foundation? With hindsight, the Financial Secretary might be advised to reply, as I have asked a series of parliamentary questions, the replies to which forced the Chief Secretary and his colleagues to reveal the shameful muddle upon muddle and shady deal upon shady deal that have continued to surround this sorry affair.

Indeed, there are only two possible solutions to the conundrum that the proposal has thrown up—either the Government have been guilty of the most crass incompetence and negligence, or they are guilty of embarking on a comprehensive strategy of deceit and duplicity. The Government can dodge the issue no longer.

The Financial Secretary must come clean and tell the House of which of those two sins the Government are guilty. The Dispatch Box could become a confessional box when the Financial Secretary replies.

I am sure that the whole House will wish to know of the lack of progress to date of that wonder scheme. Certainly, I suspect that the Minister for Sport might welcome some further information—poor chap, he has once again been sidelined. It is getting to be a habit of the Government to treat their Ministers for Sport in that shabby way. As a result, the Minister found himself only last Tuesday at a press conference having to invent a fairy-tale figure of £75 million for the amount that will be generated by the proposed scheme, as opposed to the £60 million that everybody else has been told by the Treasury. He admitted to me in a written answer yesterday that the extra £15 million could come about only as a result of increased pools betting turnover.

The Minister for Sport might know something that we do not know—certainly the Treasury does not know—about prospects for the pools industry. However, he might care to reflect on the fact which the Financial Secretary must confirm or deny tonight, that to raise that extra revenue the pools companies' turnover would need to reach £1 billion for the current 12-month period, as opposed to the £800 million that current estimates suggest. In normal circumstances, such a growth would take five years to materialise. That is hardly the most commanding and informed performance from the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), but, given his shoddy treatment at the hands of his Treasury colleagues, perhaps we should make allowances for him. After all, the Government have revealed to me that he and his officials were kept in the dark about plans for the foundation and were excluded from any discussions surrounding its creation. Indeed, he was not even granted the courtesy of an official on-the-record meeting with his colleagues from the Treasury until last Wednesday. Perhaps the Financial Secretary might care to tell the House the reason for that disgraceful snub of his colleague.

While he is about it, the Financial Secretary might care to explain plainly and simply to the 21 million adults and 7 million children who take part in sport and recreation in Britain why the Chancellor has seen fit to embark on a reckless and foolhardy gamble with the funding of that important part of their lives. The sorry tale that has been told to me by Ministers through parliamentary answers —or perhaps non-answers—is of a Chancellor who allowed himself, after just one meeting 11 days before his Budget statement, to be bounced by one pools company into an agreement to set up a body to channel funds out of our cash-starved national game, football, when they are urgently needed to provide the level of supporter safety and comfort required by Lord Justice Taylor's final report, and place it as a stake on a non-runner, the proposed foundation for sport and the arts.

That body does not exist at present, nor is its eventual appearance a certainty, as in the past there has been an agreement between the English and Scottish Football Leagues and the Pools Promoters Association that any reduction in the football pool betting duty can take place only with the leagues' consent and that two fifths of that reduction must go to the leagues. However, that is not the case for this scheme. I understand that both the leagues are taking legal advice, and it may well be that there will be a court case as a result.

The Financial Secretary must confirm whether he knows of those developments and state why the Government agreed to a scheme fraught with such uncertainty. Is it simply that the Government were not sufficiently au fait with the matter to realise that possible danger? Either way, the Government have been guilty of either recklessness or incompetence.

As the House knows, the round of talks takes place months before the Budget statement itself. Had the Chancellor acted responsibly and not dived into the scheme only 11 days before making his Budget statement, he would have had time to think through and consider all the possible snags that the proposal might encounter and which now endanger the scheme. Instead, we are left with delays, uncertainty and suspicion surrounding the feasibility of the scheme. Whatever the Government's view might be, it is clear from press reports that the other two pools companies which it is proposed should finance the foundation have severe reservations about the scheme. That is no wonder, bearing in mind that the first that they knew about the scheme for which they would have to supply millions of pounds was when, along with the rest of the nation, they saw the Chancellor's statement on television.

The Chief Secretary confirmed in a letter to me on 17 April that the Government took a conscious decision not to inform the minority pools companies of the proposal, despite the fact that

"all three companies will need to be closely involved in setting up the new trust."

What sort of shambles is that? How do the Government intend to secure close involvement from those companies when the Government have been guilty of the most disgraceful deceit towards them? Moreover, even supposing that their co-operation is forthcoming, how can any progress be made when, as told to me in written answers, the Government have not the slightest idea who will comprise the new body's membership, the ratio of funding to sport and the arts, how its operations are to be monitored, controlled or audited, or how many people will be needed to staff and administer it.

As the Government have said that this foundation will be in place by the start, in August, of the next football season, will the Minister revise that target? It is obvious that, given these problems, there is not the slightest chance of this new body's getting off the ground by then. No doubt the Minister for Sport is aware that the Government's reputation in sporting circles is currently all too low, and rapidly sinking. Who can be surprised at that when people saw their hopes raised, in the run-up to the Budget, by widely spread hints from the Minister for Sport that the Government would take some action to relieve sports' national governing bodies of the scandalous burden of corporation tax, only to see the promise replaced by this pig-in-a-poke scheme?

I know that the Rugby Football Union views the Government's actions with disdain. It has written to me staying that not only will its corporation tax bill continue to be about £500,000 each year, on top of a rates bill of £130,000, but that, as a result of the Government's VAT/poll tax bribe, it will have to find £80,000 in addition to the estimated £300,000 that it had to pay in VAT last year, as it is too late to increase published ticket prices. Mr. Dudley Wood, secretary of the RFU, has told me that all

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

this money would have been spent on the development of youth rugby and on making up for the decline in team games in schools. Instead, he comments,

"I must say we have fared pretty badly. I suppose we are a soft touch."

Unfortunately, behind all the surface hype about a so-called sports-mad Cabinet and Prime Minister, that is the reality of sport and the present Government. Sport is seen by them as a soft touch. This has gone on for far too long and it must stop now.

As one immediate step, to which the Minister must give his backing tonight, the Government could offer full and unequivocal backing to Britain's Olympic bid, which I, as a Greater Manchester Member of Parliament, am proud to say is once again to be led by the north-west. The Government could take that step through the removal of corporation tax from the British Olympic Association. Last year the Minister received a deputation on this very point. Ironically, the British Olympic Association is a victim of responding to the Government's urging that it take account of the increased competition for private funds from registered charities and the arts, and of adapting its fund-raising techniques to make greater use of corporate sponsorship agreements.

The result has been a rise, one fifth to four fifths since 1979, in the proportion of the association's income that is subject to tax. The association has written to me saying that the Budget has left it

"very disappointed . . . as the time is really now running out before the next Olympic Games."

Unless there is immediate action from the Government, the BOA's £5 million appeal for the 1992 Olympics will be encumbered by a tax bill of £1·5 million for the preceding four years.

The time for clever words and evasion from the Government is over. Both sport and the arts deserve proper funding. Whether the funds come from a national lottery or from some other source, the Government have a responsibility to see that they are made available. During the Budget debate, I asked for replies to very specific questions. Those replies were not forthcoming and, despite my writing to the Chief Secretary, I still await them. That will not do. Our sportsmen and sportswomen deserve better, our Olympic athletes deserve better and the House deserves better. I hope that the Minister will come up with some concrete replies this evening.

8.53 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Like my right hon. and hon. Friends who have spoken already, I welcome the Bill. In particular, I welcome the realistic approach of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor towards the current recession, which will prove to be considerably shorter than, a few months ago, it threatened to be because of the firm anti-inflationary stance that has been adopted by my right hon. Friend.

In the Budget, with a general election not so very far away, my right hon. Friend might have been tempted to open the economic throttle to a certain extent in order to mask the downturn over the short term, but he did not do so. Unlike Opposition Members, who advocated a large and instant cut in interest rates, my right hon. Friend wisely stuck to his anti-inflationary guns, and there are already signs in some order books that his policy is paying off. He knows that the only way to greater competitiveness and renewed growth is the maintenance of a tight fiscal policy and high interest rates until there is clear evidence of a consistent downward trend in the headline rate of inflation. In the Budget, he gave that clear message. He warned employers and employees that extravagant pay settlements would exacerbate the situation, and achieve nothing else.

Over the past 18 months, I have not always been at one with Treasury forecasts. In November 1989, I challenged the assumption that the worst scenario for 1990 would be two quarters of zero growth. I also questioned the forecast trend for the surplus on invisibles, and last autumn I expressed concern that the spending plans of some Departments might make the underlying rate of inflation a tougher nut to crack this year. Those reservations have been very largely dispelled by the realism now being displayed in the fight against inflation. That is the cornerstone for the recovery from recession and for renewed growth.

During the rest of this year, the headline rate of inflation will fall, and interest rates will be reduced to some extent, so long as German monetary policy does not pull the rest of the European Community in the opposite direction. The divergent attitudes of the United States and Germany at the G7 meeting over the weekend do not help those who wish to make short-term predictions about interest rates, but the United Kingdom rates will be lower in the months ahead, and the recession will bottom out. It will begin to bottom out in the second half of 1991.

There are already some signs that this is beginning to happen. In coming to that conclusion, I do not make use of any econometric model; I simply talk to people and ask them what is going on at the factory gates, what order books and retail sales look like. Consumer demand will recover somewhat in the summer, and order books will begin to look firmer. In the south and the midlands, the momentum will certainly take some time to gather, particularly in service industries and, of course, in capital goods industries, but the corner will shortly be turned.

Those who measure the recession by the announcements of job losses ignore the delays between a company's decision to cut jobs and the news of those redundancies being made public. For example, ICI heralded its jobs losses weeks ago, but they will take time to work through. Similarly, Marks and Spencer, which announced a reduction of 1·4 per cent. in staff numbers, did so only after a six-month study of the implications. Job losses are likely to continue to be announced well after demand has shown the first signs of recovery.

Against the background of firm anti-inflationary resolve and an appropriate degree of cautious optimism about trade over the next six to 12 months, my right hon. Friend has announced a variety of measures to help business and individuals. In the limited time available to me, I should like to refer to two reforms and then, finally, to turn to the tax treatment of company cars.

I welcome the removal of £140 from the headline community charge and its transfer to VAT. It is a pragmatic solution to a problem which beset a theoretically sensible and fair tax that has nonetheless been dogged by nightmarish difficulties of implementation. The move should be broadly neutral and will bear less heavily on those on low incomes.

I especially welcome the abolition of mortgate interest relief at the higher rate of income tax. I raised the subject

in Committee on the Finance Act 1988 and have raised it regularly since. A Conservative party whose policy is to target help on those in greatest need should not offer home-buying inducements to those who are sufficiently well off to pay the higher rate of income tax. It was an inefficient, inflationary and expensive use of taxpayers' resources. I congratulate my right hon. Friend, who will no longer have to put up with my broaching the subject with him.

As to company cars and VAT, I have long argued in the House and in Committee against the lenient treatment of the company car as a benefit in kind. It has been a tax anomaly that served neither the Exchequer nor the automotive industry well. I am pleased that the anomaly is largely being removed, but another problem arises.

Since the Budget, many companies have felt that it would make sense to pay an employee increased remuneration in place of providing that employee with a car. Some employers are keen to move in that direction by offering the employee a choice of a higher salary or a car. However, such choice appears to give rise to VAT problems in that the Customs and Excise are insisting that VAT must be imposed on the cash forgone if a car is chosen. The technical basis for that approach is unclear, but such treatment is inconsistent with my right hon. Friend's declared aim of removing the tax and national insurance differentials between cash remuneration and the provision of a car. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will look into the matter and confirm that there is no VAT penalty where an employer decides to offer the choice of a higher salary or a new car.

9 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I want to address my remarks to the most contentious aspect of the Budget, the increase in VAT, despite the fact that the media would have us believe that the tax on mobile phones was worthy of most coverage. Only a small proportion of the people have access to or need mobile phones, yet the increase in VAT hits every man and woman, no matter how old or how poor, when purchasing a VAT-rated item. Surely that goes against the grain for a Government who claim that cutting taxation is one of their main achievements.

We should not be surprised about the increase in VAT, because one of the first actions of the 1979 Conservative Government was to increase VAT from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. Now the Government of tax cuts have admitted that VAT is making up an increasing proportion of revenue. In 1990-91, revenue received through VAT was 55 per cent. of the amount raised in income tax. In the current year, that will rise to 60 per cent.

Of course, it has to be recognised that the VAT increase was a fig leaf for the Government's understandable embarrassment about the disastrous poll tax. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) said that it was a good idea which could not be implemented, but that ignores the facts. It was not popular from the north to the south of the country, and particularly in Scotland, where we had to put up with it a year before anyone else. It was unsaleable to anyone in any part of the United Kingdom.

The regressive poll tax has been replaced by a still more regressive measure. The 20 per cent. minimum poll tax payment which everyone was required to make has no comparison in VAT. No matter how poor a person is, he still pays 100 per cent. of the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT. There is nowhere to hide. VAT does not take account of an individual's ability to pay. That has to be recognised.

A typical family now pays 5 per cent. of its income in VAT, compared to 2·8 per cent. in 1979 before the Conservatives' election victory. Because of the increase of 2·5 per cent., the proportion of income paid in VAT in the coming year will be 5·8 per cent. So much for tax cuts, and that despite the fact——

Mr. Mans: Am I to take it from what the hon. Gentleman has said that he advocates the removal of the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT?

Mr. Watson: Yes, I do. I think that it was a mistake. As I said, it was a fig leaf for the Government, and it will not be popular. As was said earlier in the debate, VAT is an expenditure tax rather than an income tax, yet it is increasing the percentage of an individual's income that is paid in tax. The only reason that the poorest in society are not hit harder by VAT is that they can often afford little more than the basics, which are zero-rated. That is some escape for them, but not a means of escape that anyone would take willingly.

The Government should not imagine that the people of Scotland, Wales and England will be fooled by the apparently generous cut of £140 in poll tax. They did not highlight in their announcement the fact that many people will not get a reduction of anything like £140. In Scotland, for instance, only 2·2 million of the 3·8 million due to pay poll tax will get the full reduction of £140. A massive 1·6 million will not qualify, because they were due to pay a lesser amount in terms of poll tax. So the £140 payment is a smokescreen. It will apply to some people; it will certainly not apply to many others.

Leaving that not unimportant point aside, the people will not be fooled. It is not as if the Government can now say that the poll tax has been abolished and they have introduced a council tax, whatever form that may eventually take. The people will not forget the poll tax, because they will not be allowed to forget it. Every time they make a purchase of a VAT-rated item, they will be paying a 2·5 per cent. poll tax surcharge. That will stick in people's minds, and it will stick in people's pockets.

A different, although also important, aspect of the VAT increase which I do not think has been covered in the debate so far is the heavy additional burden that will be placed on charities. The rise from 15 per cent. to 17·5 per cent. means an additional £33 million a year cost for charities in the United Kingdom. Before the Budget, the Charities Tax Reform Group had petitioned the Chancellor on behalf of the major charities with a means of reducing the VAT burden on charities. Not only was that ignored, but the Chancellor introduced measures which mean that charities are now much worse off. A sum of £250 million is now the total irrecoverable VAT bill facing charities in the United Kingdom.

It has to be understood that that additional £33 million is money which must be taken from the many worthwhile causes for which charities raise their money. When people give to charities, they do not believe that they are putting a 10p, 50p or £1 coin in the tin to pay for increased VAT payments. In return, the Government's so-called

[Mr. Watson]

concessions to charities in the Budget amount to a miserly £5 million, a mere one seventh of the additional cost caused by VAT rising to 17·5 per cent.

This takes place against the backdrop of a reduction in voluntary income to charities. With the recession at the moment, it is hardly surprising that people are able to give less, and charities are suffering. The VAT increase as a result of this Budget will make that situation even more difficult. Even with the advent some three years ago of the payroll giving scheme, a total of only around £16 million has found its way to charities in the intervening period.

Doubtless that scheme will produce more over the years, as will gift aid perhaps, but that takes time, and that is the key to my argument. While time for such schemes to become established is necessary, increases in taxation, and particularly this VAT increase, take immediate effect. Charities have no chance to plan; there is no phasing-in period, no room and no time for charities to adjust.

As for the effect on the average family, the Government have misread, or more likely simply ignored, the results at that level of the increase in VAT.

I believe that the Government must take steps to reduce the effects of the blunt instrument that VAT inevitably is. I hope that they will use the Committee stage of the Bill to do so.

9.7 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): This debate is taking place against a background of the concern of the House at the present state of the British economy. We find ourselves now at a particularly unfavourable moment in the trade cycle, but I am afraid that it is a fact of economic life that there always will be trade cycles. It follows from this that there will be times when we are at the bottom rather than the top of the trade cycle. If the Labour party has not yet focused on that fact and digested it, it has not really got to first base in terms of understanding the requirements of economic management. Given that there will always be trade cycles, the key thing that the electorate expect of a Government is that they will know how to manage the economy at whatever stage of the trade cycle the country may be.

Here there is a very considerable contrast between what the Government are offering the country—I am quite convinced that we are broadly on the right lines—and what the Opposition are offering. I find some of the Labour party's remedies for dealing with our present economic situation bizarre, to say the least.

I shall give four examples, the first being interest rates. It is common ground in the House that the economy was overheating in 1988 and 1989. Britain had a tremendous boom which was not enjoyed by other members of the European Community, and advantages flowed from it. It was clear that measures had to be taken to reduce borrowing and increase saving. There is only one way to ensure that people save more and borrow less—increase the cost of borrowing and the return from saving. That means increasing interest rates, which is what the Government did.

Every time the Government increased base rates in 1988, 1989 and 1990, the Labour party opposed the increase. The Labour party was not willing to take the necessary measures. Had we taken its advice, the overheating would have continued and inflation would have been about 20 per cent., as it was under the Labour Government. The measures needed—whether we had decided to take them or whether they were forced on us by the international community and our creditors through a sterling crisis, as happened in 1975 and 1976—would have been even more savage, and the recession would have been deeper than the present recession.

Labour Members are attached to a second aspect of the Labour party's policies. They believe that an effective remedy for the British economy would be increased taxation—for example, income tax. We have dwelt on the considerable economic damage that would be done by increasing the income tax paid by higher earners, who tend to add the greatest value per head to the economy, for obvious reasons, and are internationally mobile. The damage that would be done is clear.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) did not receive a reply to his question. He asked whether, if the higher rate of income tax was increased to 59 per cent.—as it would be under a Labour Government—the rate of capital gains tax would be increased to the same level. Conservative Members have a responsibility to continue asking that pertinent question until we get a reply. If the answer is no and we would keep capital gains tax at 40 per cent. while allowing the higher rate of income tax to increase to 59 per cent., the problems associated with bond washing, roll-up schemes and people converting income into capital gains would arise. The neutrality of the tax system which has been established by the Government would be destroyed.

If we did as the Labour party intends and increased capital gains tax to 59 per cent., we would end up with the highest rate of capital gains tax in the western world. The reduction in after-tax returns to investors would have a crippling effect, and an enormous amount of investment would be forgone. There would be almost no venture capital investment with such a penal capital gains tax.

Thirdly, Labour Members have advocated a training tax. That is superficially attractive. Companies would be told that, unless they spent a certain proportion of their turnover or wages bill on training, they would forfeit to the Government the difference between training spend and the threshold, and the money would be used to provide training.

I wonder whether the Labour party has begun to think through the consequences. There would be enormous waste. Any firm that decided on purely commercial criteria to spend less than the threshold amount on training would have an incentive to spend the difference on anything that could be called training, however bogus.

Precedents have been set in other countries. I know from my experience of running a subsidiary of a British merchant bank in France of the system that operates there. Unless I spent 1 per cent. of my wage bill on so-called training, I had to pay the difference between that and my actual training spend to the French Government. As there was no inducement to ensure that money was spent wisely, once I decided what needed to be spent on training in the interests of the business, if someone wanted to learn Spanish or even knitting, I did not mind because the money was lost to the company anyway.

Such a training tax is a recipe for wasting valuable company resources. It is based on characteristic Labour prejudice and its belief that politicians and bureaucrats can second-guess business decisions and should decide

appropriate training levels. It is absurd for central Government to try to assess what is appropriate across the board—for all business sectors, for all time.

Fourthly, the greatest folly of all is the concept of a minimum wage, which would of course increase unemployment. If one increases the price of any commodity, one also reduces demand for it. We could argue all night about the extent of the job losses that would result from a minimum wage, if it were ever implemented—but let there be no doubt that the figure would be substantial, with estimates varying between 750,000 and 1 million.

A minimum wage would also serve to increase inflation by increasing labour costs at the lower end of the wage scale and the knock-on effect that it would have on wage rates and pay demands throughout the economy. A minimum wage would be of no benefit to those at the lower end of the pay scale whom it was designed to benefit, because they would lose family credit entitlement.

Given the present state of the economy, it takes considerable genius to devise a system which would increase unemployment and inflation—two evils that the Government are currently addressing—and which would offer no benefit to the very sector of the community that it was designed to help. It is a form of genius in which the Labour party appears to specialise.

9.17 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) on being honest in expressing his views on the increase in value added tax. Some Opposition Members—notably the hon. Members for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott)—said that VAT is a regressive tax that affects the poor most of all. However, when it came to whether Labour would get rid of it, those hon. Members were less than honest in what they said. As was pointed out by one or two of my hon. Friends, they dithered—in the same way as the Leader of the Opposition is dithering over whether to commit Labour to abolishing VAT.

The shift from local to indirect taxation was a fundamental part of my right hon. Friend's Budget, and it is one of which I thoroughly approve. I go along also with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) in believing that it is a pity that the Government did not go all the way and get rid of local taxation—at least until such time as they decide on a new structure for local government.

I am pleased that the Government went as far as they did, but hope that we will take on board the consequences. There is now a high level of gearing in terms of the way in which local tax works on local expenditure. It brings in only 11 per cent. of total local revenue, which means that just a small percentage increase in the tax could make for a large increase in the amount of money that people must pay. At least it is capped and I suggest that it will have to be capped at a relatively low level. That is the main difference between our suggestions for local government finance and those of the Opposition. Their fair rates proposal has no top limit, and no capping. It is rather odd that they are suggesting certain limits on central Government taxation and expenditure, but that they are not suggesting any capping for local government expenditure. That is a fundamental flaw in their economic programme.

Another aspect of the Finance Bill is the excellent help that it gives to worker share ownership plans and to profit-related pay. As many hon. Members know, I have encouraged that subject for a number of years, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor). It is certainly encouraging that we are moving in the direction of allowing employees to take a fuller part in the operation of their companies. Profit-related pay improves productivity, cuts costs and improves job security. I hope that, at times when profits are not as great as they have been, directors and top managers will incur a cut in their profit-related pay.

This Budget is undoubtedly good for business, but there is still a lot to do, especially as regards the environment. However, I sincerely hope that that aspect of the Budget can be dealt with in Committee.

9.21 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): We must always examine a Finance Bill in relation to the economic circumstances from which it arises, for it is against that background that it may best be judged. Tonight and in Committee it will be our argument that the Bill miserably fails to measure up to the desperately needed measures required by the economy. We are in a deep recession and no amount of hype from the Chancellor, the Chief Secretary or Conservative Members will hide that fact.

That argument has formed a large part of our debate this evening. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) spoke eloquently of the fact that engineers in his constituency are finding this recession even worse than the recession of 1980. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) talked about the great British industries which were being run down by the market ideologies of the past 12 years.

My hon. Friends the Members for Neath (Mr. Hain) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) spoke about important issues—how our economic circumstances are affecting their constituents.

Other important matters have been mentioned today. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) drew attention to the crucial question of what will happen to the proposed foundation for sport and the arts. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) spoke about the impact of measures in the Bill, especially upon people with low incomes. Perhaps most perceptive of all was my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who contributes to our debates on the Finance Bill each year and who spoke about the Government's false optimism which parallels, almost precisely, what occurred in the 1920s.

The bare facts of our economic condition are incontestable. Since the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Chancellor, 500,000 people have lost their jobs. Last month's rise in unemployment was the highest since records began. Every day, 100 businesses go bust in Britain and 3,000 people lose their jobs. The Chancellor has forecast that growth will fall by 2 per cent. this year. Meanwhile, growth in Germany is 4·5 per cent. and in France it is 1·8 per cent.

[Mr. Chris Smith]

Let us have no nonsense from the Government about international factors being the cause of the recession. Even the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee did not buy that argument.

Worst of all, investment as a whole is set to fall this year by nearly 10 per cent. and manufacturing investment is set to fall even further. Investment does not seem really to matter to the Chancellor. It is, in his words of yesterday, "a lagging indicator." Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the blinkered economic vision of this Government. Far from being a lagging indicator, investment is the key future indicator of economic performance. According to the CBI's industrial trends survey, which has been widely quoted by the Government today, the chairman of the CBI's economic situation committee, Mr. David Wigglesworth, makes that point. He says:

"Investment in plant and machinery is still being cut heavily and this can only reduce the capacity of firms to respond when demand recovers."

It was precisely the lack of capacity to respond to demand that created the problems of the mid-1980s and led to the recession that we now face. To write off investment as an indicator behind the present trend ignores the fact that it is a crucial determining factor of the future trend. The Chancellor would do well to recognise that fact.

Mr. Butterfill: As the hon. Gentleman seems to regard investment as such an important factor, can he say what his party would do to encourage it? We have heard that the Labour party would put a tax on savings which, in turn, would have an effect on investment. More particularly, if we look at the unincorporated sector, his proposals for a 59 per cent. tax rate mean that the risk-reward ratio for the unincorporated sector would be absolutely diabolical.

Mr. Smith: I shall turn shortly to the corporate tax allowance measures and the reform of the business expansion scheme which we propose, since they deal with precisely the point as to how we should encourage investment in a far more effective way than the Government propose in the Bill.

When the Chancellor tells us that recovery is just around the corner and when the Chief Secretary speaks —as he did even today—about what he calls the transformation of the British economy, they are talking nonsense, and I think that they know it. All the figures for output, investment, job vacancies, bankruptcies, growth and unemployment reveal that our economy is in deep trouble. Both we and the British people will not accept any attempts by the Government to talk their way out of the morass that they themselves have created.

Remember, these were the people who told us a year ago that there would be no recession and who said, a few months ago, that, yes, there would be a recession but that it would be relatively shallow and short-lived. We did not believe them then. We do not believe them now when they say that recovery is coming, and coming soon. I wish, for the sake of millions of people and of thousands of firms, that it were true. Sadly, it is not.

There is one other myth that we must lay to rest. The Chief Secretary talked with astonishing pride of the Government's record on growth during the 1980s. He called it a success story. Let us get the figures perfectly clear. Average growth between 1979 and 1990 was 1·75 per cent. a year. That is the lowest figure achieved by any Government in this country since the second world war. Average growth, incidentally, under the 1974 to 1979 Labour Government was 2 per cent.

Mr. Sayeed: Can the hon. Gentleman give comparative figures for 1982 up to the present day?

Mr. Smith: By asking that question the hon. Gentleman reveals precisely the fallacy in the figures that are constantly trotted out by the Government. Of course, they ask us to look at their performance during the period from when the first recession that they created was finishing until the second recession was beginning, ignoring the periods of negative growth before and afterwards which must also be included in the equation. If the Chief Secretary believes that the worst performance since the war is a success story, he had better think again.

How does the Finance Bill measure up against a background of recession, rising unemployment and negative growth? Our opinion is that it measures up pretty poorly. There are some measures that we welcome. Last year we argued strongly for VAT relief on bad debts at one year rather than two years. Even after further consideration in last year's Finance Bill the Government rejected it. We welcome their repentance now.

For many years now we have been arguing for mortgage interest relief to be available only at the standard rate of tax. The Chief Secretary has recognised belatedly that it is fair to give the same rate of relief to all taxpayers. So why did the Government reject our proposal last year and the year before and why did the present Prime Minister tell the Welsh Tories last July how strongly he condemned Labour for meddling by making precisely that proposal? Again, we welcome the Government's repentance.

One item that was in the Budget but is not specifically included in the Bill is the increase in child benefit. It is long overdue and it is not enough. It involves a miserly 25p for the second and subsequent children, but at least it breaks the freeze and we welcome that repentance, too.

However, we have one question. The Government saved £360 million by freezing the married couple's allowance. They used only £220 million of that saving for the change in child benefit. Why did not they use the whole lot?

Although we welcome some items in the Budget and the Bill, many others are either iniquitous or inadequate or both. Of course, a general relief on corporation tax rates will be welcomed by some businesses, although not all, but it is better than nothing. It does not add up to a so-called Budget for business and will fail entirely to achieve what is most desperately needed—a motor to get investment going again.

That is why before the Budget we proposed a system of enhanced first-year capital allowances for investment in manufacturing industry to help give a kick start to the purchase of new plant, machinery and technology and the carrying out of research. That would have done far more in a far more focused way than anything in the Finance Bill. That is why we also proposed a complete change in the business expansion scheme to attract private funds into new enterprises, especially in the regions. Yet the Bill leaves the business expansion scheme precisely where it was before—a tax haven for the rich that is used almost entirely for investment in private rented property.

I now turn to the miserable measure proposed in the Bill for training enhancement. Any recognition of training needs by a Government who have lopped £350 million off employment training and £300 million off youth training in the past two years is welcome, but what a wasted opportunity it is. We have been given a miserly scheme, hedged about with restrictions, which will cost the Exchequer only £15 million in a full year and will not come in for another year in any case. We could have had a proper recognition of the training needs of industry and a training programme led by Government initiative but drawing on the real enthusiasm to deliver in many industries. We proposed such a programme, but all that we got was £15 million in two years' time. That is hardly a good answer to our underskilled position in the world economic league.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is making a series of interesting expenditure commitments for a putative Labour Government. How do they fit in with the stated priorities of his colleague, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), and the statement on Sunday by the Labour party leader that there is no more cash?

Mr. Smith: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has not examined properly the proposals that we made in advance of the Budget. We set out clearly and in a costed fashion the measures that we recommended, including a major package of proposals on training, and we set out how we would go about funding them. The hon. Gentleman should examine his facts a little more carefully before intervening again.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I have only five more minutes and I must get on.

The centrepiece of the Budget and the Bill is the increase in VAT from 15 per cent. to 17·5 per cent. in order to get the Government off the poll tax hook. In a phrase that the Chief Secretary will come to regret, he said—I think that I am quoting him correctly—"In the circumstances in which we found ourselves, this was an appropriate step." Found themselves? Who dreamed up the poll tax? Who voted it through and imposed it on the British people? Who, even now, have offered no word of apology for the unfairness, administrative chaos, hardship and grotesque waste of public money that the poll tax fiasco has caused? The answer is the Government, including the Chief Secretary. The blame for the poll tax and for the shift in taxation to mitigate its electoral impact will lie fairly and squarely with the Government. The VAT increase is putting up prices, making people worse off and fuelling the underlying rate of inflation. The Government have made the wrong choice in their desperation to get rid of the poll tax liability that they created.

There is precious little in the Budget for the environment. The Government have taken some steps to bring company car taxation more into line with the proper value of the benefit. However, there is still no satisfactory distinction in the tax system between a car provided as a perk and one that is an essential tool of the trade. Where are the imaginative measures that could have been taken? We proposed an increase in the differential between leaded and unleaded petrol, an incentive for the fitting of catalytic converters, incentives for the purchase of environmentally sensitive products and the carrying out of home improvements, a graded scale of vehicle excise duty to encourage the use of smaller cars and a levy on landfill waste disposal. Such a programme of measures could have used the taxation system to help the environment. The Government have totally failed to take up that challenge.

The Bill fails to take up the challenges facing our economy. It will do virtually nothing to help lift us out of recession. It will do precious little for families with children. It will do hardly anything for the environment. The Government started with a recession and are ending with a recession with an irresponsible short-term boom in the middle. They have failed the economy, as does the Bill. It is time for a Labour Government to start the recovery.

9.39 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): The Budget will, this year alone, make available to business three quarters of a billion pounds by not taxing it to the extent that it would have been taxed without the changes in the Bill. That decision was taken because we know that businesses are going through a difficult period. The recession will not go on for ever. We can speculate endlessly about when it will end, but we know that it certainly will end, and that when it does, British business will be well placed to grow in the 1990s as it did in the 1980s.

The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) seemed to forget that the debate was on the Finance Bill. She sent her researchers scurrying to find every bad statistic and every chance remark made by a commentator to construct a dreary litany of gloom. There was no good news that could not be rubbished and no bad news that could not be magnified. Sadly, she neglected the Bill and its important contribution to stimulating and encouraging recovery.

We listened with interest to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who maintained a curious combination of contentions—that inflation was out of control but that we should relax monetary policy by cutting interest rates. He seems to have become a late convert to the "Monklands law" that, whatever the interest rate, it should be lower. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is pleased to have a convert. It is important to be aware of the priority that the hon. Gentleman attaches to the reduction and control of inflation.

The debate, as always, attracted many important and serious speeches. One thinks particularly of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), whose Committee has done such important work on the subject. He made, as usual, a speech of great authority, to which we listened with great respect.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) made a series of extraordinary allegations that will surprise my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport when he reads them in *Hansard*. He made several points; I regret that I did not answer them earlier, so perhaps I shall deal with a few of them now. Consultations are being held on the creation of the foundation for sport and the arts. It was always clear that we would contribute only if all three pools promoters participated, if the foundation was established on acceptable terms and if all the duty cut was passed to the foundation. He asked why the Bill does not cut the duty. That will appear as a new clause in

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Committee, with other Budget proposals that were not ready for inclusion when the Bill was published. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary will deal in detail with any further questions from the hon. Gentleman.

I am sorry that I missed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), but I have seen a note of it. He mentioned inheritance tax and the possibility of 100 per cent. relief for businesses, which I have discussed with him previously. Already, 50 per cent. relief is available for substantial holdings in unquoted companies, which means an effective rate of 20 per cent. That compares well with regimes in other countries. Help is available in paying inheritance tax, such as payment over 10 years with interest-free instalments.

My hon. Friends the Members for Esher (Mr. Taylor) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans) spoke of the proposals to encourage the use of employee share schemes. I am grateful for their support. The proposals will take this important process further, which is to be widely welcomed. I am sorry that it was not more widely welcomed by Opposition Members, who I would have thought would favour workers having the opportunity of being encouraged to participate directly in the success of the enterprises for which they work.

My hon. Friends the Members for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) and for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) made important and serious speeches. They both have considerable experience in the commercial world, which benefits their contributions and our debates.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) referred to clause 50 and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) mentioned it in an intervention. I know that several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have expressed concern about its provisions. We have listened seriously to what they have said about this difficult and technical set of issues. No doubt they can be thoroughly explored in Committee and I look forward to my right hon. and hon. Friends' contributions to those debates. I believe that the measure is right. It does not involve any double taxation and it is not retrospective. It simply remedies a technical defect and without it there would be a return to the building societies' general funds —not to the investors or depositors on whose interest the tax was levied in the first place—of the tax that properly should have been paid and properly was paid. I repeat that, without the provisions, there would be a capricious return of that tax to the building societies, which would reflect, at random, the point in the financial year at which their accounting year ended.

Sir William Clark: In view of the interest in clause 50 among my hon. Friends and the importance of retrospection and double taxation, would it not be a good idea if that clause were discussed on the Floor of the House rather than upstairs in Committee?

Mr. Maude: I hear what my right hon. Friend says. As he knows, such matters tend to be discussed through what are delicately known as "the usual channels" and no doubt they will be discussed in that way. Nevertheless, we are very much aware of the concern about this. The case for proceeding with clause 50 is powerful and we have considered it extremely carefully. I look forward to the opportunity of continuing the task of persuading my right hon. Friend that it is right.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I do not want to dispute what my hon. Friend has said because he has much of the Finance Bill to cover in the next 14 minutes, but may I refer other hon. Members to the House of Lords judgments, because there is at least a point of argument about whether everything that their Lordships have said has been accepted by my hon. Friend?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend makes the point that there are disputed matters. There is plenty of scope for argument, and I look forward to pursuing the subject with my right hon. and hon. Friends—or rather my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is looking forward to pursing this matter in Committee. Comes the hour, comes the man, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will deal persuasively with this point in Committee.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South also referred to mobile telephones. I know of his concern about what he describes as a petty measure. I do not believe that it is petty. The private benefit of a portable telephone that is provided by an employer is already chargeable to tax but, at the moment, if it is to be properly accounted for, the employer has to keep detailed fiddly records, and that is a burden upon him. The introduction of a simple scale charge, at a modest level that would reflect only slight private use of the portable telephone, is a simplifying measure that will make life easier for employers. There has been a great deal of misrepresentation about the effect of this measure, but I believe that it is right. It is also right that we should extend it to car phones.

Sir William Clark: Why should my hon. Friend suggest placing extra administrative burdens on small business men because of some private use, when mobile telephones produce about £10 million for the Exchequer? Surely that is administrative nonsense.

Mr. Maude: The point I was making was that the introduction of a simple scale charge would reduce the burden on small businesses because if there is a private benefit from the use of a portable phone, that is already chargeable to tax and already required to be accounted for in detail to the Inland Revenue. That seems burdensome; it would be simpler and better to replace it with a straightforward and modest scale charge.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) raised the issue of capital gains tax in general terms. I am not one of the Financial Secretaries who has had the benefit of a conversation about that with him, but I look forward to doing so and to pursuing the points that he argued so persuasively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) talked about shipping. I know that there is concern about that, but as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in the Budget statement, there are limits to the extent to which the tax system can be skewed towards the special needs of a particular industry. It is worth saying that ships already receive capital allowances of 25 per cent. a year, which gives nearly full relief over seven to eight years. That compares with the average economic life of a ship—bought new—of 15 to 20 years, so the present regime already gives more relief more quickly against tax

than would be the case if there were a straightforward allowance for commercial depreciation. The most important help that we can give the shipping industry is to foster business generally. Shipping will benefit from many of the other measures contained in the Budget, especially the cut in the main corporation tax rate.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my hon. Friend accept that our position is extremely poor vis-à-vis those countries with whom we must compete if we are to have an effective merchant marine because our competitors have much better capital allowance systems?

Mr. Maude: There are different capital tax regimes and corporation tax regimes in different countries and that will always be the case. As a result of the Budget, we now have a corporation tax regime that will give us the lowest tax rate of any country in the European Community—indeed, of any country in the Group of Seven. That is a massive advantage to British business, including shipping. We should emphasise the great benefits that will flow from that system.

Many of the contributions from the Opposition referred to investment. It is important, but it is not an end in itself—it is a means to increase productivity and to improve business. However, sometimes the Opposition talk as though investment were intrinsically desirable and as though one measured the success of an economy by the increase in the amount of investment. The economy did not grow to the extent that it did in the 1980s merely because there were record levels of investment; it grew because productivity increased, because industrial relations improved and because innovation increased. One can sometimes make too much of the influence of Governments on investment.

> "Tinkering via investment, subsidies or other means to alter the relationship between the cost of capital and the rate of return on investment has noticeably failed."

Those are not my words, but those of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, in a speech that he made about five years ago. I think that he was right. He made the perceptive point that what matters is the real commercial rate of return on investment, not the artificial rate of return that is created by tax incentives and by subsidies. I am sorry that he has regressed from that position to the point where he and the Labour party now argue for increased capital allowances for industry, and for a tax credit for additional research and development. At one point, it seemed that the Labour party had accepted the Government's approach to corporation tax and it is sad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has apparently not learnt the lesson but has regressed to previous heresies.

This evening, we have heard much about what the Labour party would not like to see. We have heard less about Opposition Members do want. We know that they want to spend more public money because they have said so. That is a plausible claim and we believe that part of what they say because the Labour party has always spent more money when it has been in government. However, it is less clear where that money will come from.

Oddly enough, the Labour party's documents do not throw much light——

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Which documents?

Mr. Maude: I will show where the information comes from if that will help the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) because he will not get the information from Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen.

The Opposition claim that they will raise £1 billion by tackling offshore trusts. That is a spendid idea, but there are two snags. The first is that we are already doing that, and the second is that it will raise not £1 billion, but less than £100 million. There is no pot of gold there. What is the Opposition's next wheeze? "Opportunity Britain" states that there is £5 billion in uncollected taxes, enough to pay for the entire backlog of school repairs and rebuilding. Once again that is a pot of gold and a windfall of £5 billion just waiting to be scooped in. However, there is one problem That money does not stay uncollected. It is the amount of tax which, by the end of the Inland Revenue accounting year, happens not to have been collected. Nearly all of it is collected soon afterwards, much of it with interest added. Bang goes another pot of gold and with it bang goes Labour's programme for school repairs and rebuilding.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): With regard to collecting taxes, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is aware of the vitally important cancer research at the Paterson institute in south Manchester and I use the word "vitally" in its literal sense. Is he aware that the institute faces a VAT bill of £1·2 million on its voluntary funded work and that that will now increase to £1·4 million? Is there nothing that he can do to help?

Mr. Maude: The right hon. Gentleman raised that matter at Treasury questions a few days ago. I explained then that there are limits on the extent to which exemptions can be given under European Community law. There are already tax reliefs worth £800 million a year to charities, of which £150 million are reliefs on VAT. However, there are limits to the extent to which they can be extended. We understand what the right hon. Gentleman has said, and no doubt my hon. Friend the Minister of State will consider the point.

Where else will the money come from to pay for Labour's spending programme? "Opportunity Britain" states:

> "We will increase the Inland Revenue staffing and introduce tougher tax laws thus raising substantial extra income for public services."

That is the key. This brave new programme for "Opportunity Britain" is not just a tax collection programme; it is a job creation scheme. The brave new programme means more tax men and more staff for the Inland Revenue.

What about those tougher tax laws? What tax laws? Are all tax laws to be made a bit tougher or are some to be made a lot tougher? Which tax laws? How much extra income? From whom? What on? Who pays? How much and who collects it? Where are the answers to those questions?

What are the Opposition going to do about VAT? Apparently, the Opposition now accept the increase in VAT that we are introducing this year. However, I recall that when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced his Budget, the Leader of the Opposition claimed that that was not a fair way to collect additional taxation. Does that view still stand? Would the Opposition reverse the increase? If so, where are they going to get the extra money? If they are not going to

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reverse it, why did the Leader of the Opposition say that it was unfair? Either they propose to leave in place something that they believe to be unfair or they believe that it is fair and the Leader of the Opposition has got it wrong. If he got it wrong, he should apologise. Which is it? Where are the answers? When it comes to taxes, the answer is always the same—"Tax the rich". That is what they always claim to do. They think that somehow the British public will accept that there is a painless way to raise all the extra tax.

We know what they have done. We do not need to look at the crystal ball; we can read it in the books. All Labour Governments have increased the basic rate of tax—the rate of tax that every taxpayer pays—and yet all Labour Governments have claimed in opposition that they would increase tax only on the rich. We need only to look at the history books. In the 1960s, the Labour Government increased the basic rate of tax by 2½ per cent. In the 1970s, they increased it by 5 per cent. Had they told the electorate that? No, of course they had not. They were very coy about it. The British people know what they propose to do. The British people know that a Labour Government, like Labour councils, mean high spending and high taxes. They have had it once, they have had it several times, and they do not want it again. That is why they will continue to return a Conservative Government.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 209.

Division No. 132] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom

Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Clauses Nos. 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 31 and 77 and Schedule 14 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the

Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I beg to oppose the motion.

For procedural reasons, I am speaking against the Government motion. I should, if I had been in order, have preferred to speak in favour of my instruction, but I understand that that is not possible.

I want to argue why clause 50 should be taken on the Floor of the House, and it may be for the convenience of the House if I do that fairly briefly.

It was a mistake for the Government to use the Budget in 1985 rather than primary legislation to achieve what they were after.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would hon. Members below the Gangway please either leave the Chamber or come in and sit quietly?

Mr. Bottomley: It would have been possible in a debate on the Floor of the House to argue that it might have been better for the Government to consult the Building Societies Association over what effect their regulations might have, rather than go through three sets of the law courts. It would be possible to argue in a Committee of the whole House that it has been a mistake for the Government to keep trying to change the law, and certainly it would be possible to argue that it was a mistake for the Government to keep the cash for five months after the House of Lords judgments on 25 October 1990. That may be a matter which could be dealt with in other ways. I have today referred the matter to the Parliamentary Commissioner.

The difficulty that the House is in is that the House of Lords has judged very clearly that the House of Commons did not know what it was doing when it approved the amended regulations. The fact that the Revenue knew that the regulations by themselves were not sufficient is shown by the fact that they amended them.

Page 4 of the Building Societies Association letter could be quoted in a debate on the Floor of the House, where it says that the House of Lords held that there was a fundamental flaw in the regulations—this is the important point which should be considered by the whole House—"consequent on the double taxation."

There is also, on page 3 of the letter from the Leeds Permanent building society to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, the statement:

"In the unanimous opinion of the House of Lords, the retrospective Regulations tax twice."

There is a subsidiary issue as to whether subsequent regulations of the House allowed the Revenue to tax twice, and that I think is a matter for the whole House. I do not think that anyone in the House realised at the time that that was what was happening.

The final point, on page 4 of the Leeds letter, to which I would have referred if there had been a debate on the Floor of the House, is that the Inland Revenue's counsel argued in the House of Lords that he found it too embarrassing to defend the Government's windfall claim. That is a point which I was making to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary more obliquely. The letter goes on to say that the counsel for the Revenue "told their Lordships that they should not ask themselves if this was 'just or unjust', but only whether Parliament had, by the 1986 retrospective amendment, 'decreed this state of affairs, just or unjust'."

It is clearly a matter for the whole House to decide whether it is just or unjust. That is why I argue that we ought to have clause 50 on the Floor of the House. However, if we cannot do it in a Committee of the whole House, we shall have to wait until the Standing Committee reports back to the House. Those are the words of Lord Oliver on page 9 of his judgment, Lord Goff on page 18 and Lord Lowry on page 25. Those seem to be points to which all hon. Members will want to refer.

My final point is one not of constitutional procedure but of politics. If each member of a building society loses £25 on average, there is the prospect of 10 million people writing to their Member of Parliament or to my right hon. Friends the Chancellor or the Prime Minister asking for their money back. That strikes me as rather inappropriate politics if we have a general election within the next year. My guess is that, on reconsideration, the Government will want either to change clause 50 or, preferably, to drop it. I hope that, between now and when the clause is debated, they will decide to do the latter.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude) *rose*—

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid that there can be only one speech against the committal motion.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills):—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 28.

Division No. 133] **[10.20 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Aitken, Jonathan	Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Allason, Rupert	Buck, Sir Antony
Amess, David	Burns, Simon
Amos, Alan	Butterfill, John
Arbuthnot, James	Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Carrington, Matthew
Ashby, David	Carttiss, Michael
Aspinwall, Jack	Cash, William
Atkinson, David	Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Chapman, Sydney
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Chope, Christopher
Baldry, Tony	Churchill, Mr
Batiste, Spencer	Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Beckett, Margaret	Colvin, Michael
Bellingham, Henry	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Bendall, Vivian	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Cope, Rt Hon John
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Couchman, James
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Cran, James
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Boateng, Paul	Curry, David
Body, Sir Richard	Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Boswell, Tim	Day, Stephen
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Devlin, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*	Dixon, Don
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Dorrell, Stephen
Bowis, John	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes	Dover, Den
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Dunn, Bob
Brazier, Julian	Durant, Sir Anthony
Bright, Graham	Dykes, Hugh
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Emery, Sir Peter

Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bottomley, Peter
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cryer, Bob
Douglas, Dick
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Nellist, Dave
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Committee tomorrow.

ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1989-90

CLASS VIII, VOTE 14

Community Charge

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I beg to move,

That a further sum, not exceeding £4,834,497,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £4,013,497,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on grants to local authorities in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses; on rate rebate grants; on emergency financial assistance to local authorities; and on repayments of excess contributions made by local authorities and other bodies in respect of non-domestic rates in 1990-91.

It may be convenient to discuss also the other two motions:

CLASS XV, VOTE 22

That a further sum, not exceeding £520,381,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £431,000,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Scottish Office Environment Department on grants to local authorities in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses; on rate rebates and transitional relief grants; and the special payments scheme to local authorities in Scotland.

CLASS XVI, VOTE 11

That a further sum, not exceeding £333,187,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £33,000,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Welsh Office on residual rate rebate for the disabled grants, grants to local authorities in Wales in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses.

The motions seek approval for expenditure under the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991. The Act received Royal Assent on 28 March, and the expenditure is urgently needed to compensate local authorities for certain provisions in the Act. That is why we have taken the unusual step of bringing forward these supplementary estimates for the House's approval tonight.

In recent years, the burden of paying for local services has fallen too heavily on local taxpayers. We propose to ease that burden through a series of measures that will redress the balance between local and national taxation. In the longer term, we shall ensure that the council tax which replaces the community charge will need to raise less money than was raised by the rates in their last years or the community charge last year. For the short term, the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act provides for an immediate reduction of £140 in the level of community charges set by local authorities for 1991-92.

Since the Act will have a significant impact on the finances of local authorities during the current year, we are providing authorities with assistance in three ways. First, we are compensating them for the effects on their cash flow of the delay in sending out bills. Secondly, we are reimbursing them for the direct loss of community charge income as a result of the £140 reduction. Thirdly, we will reimburse the reasonable additional administrative costs which they have incurred as a result of the recent legislation.

Since this year's community charge bills are being sent out late, it is inevitable that authorities will suffer losses of interest on revenue that they had budgeted to receive in the first few weeks of the financial year. We are taking steps to offset those losses. In England, we have brought forward the amounts payable to local authorities from the pool of non-domestic rates. We made an extra payment on 5 April which authorities would not otherwise have received and, overall, in the first two months of the year, we are paying out 32 per cent. of each authority's business rates entitlement for the year as a whole.

This should ensure that authorities are adequately compensated for the cash flow shortfall that they would otherwise face. In Scotland, a similar effect is being achieved by advancing payments of revenue support grant, and in Wales we are achieving the same ends by front-loading the new community charge grant which will reimburse authorities for the £140 reduction.

As I have said, front loading is only part of the picture. We also intend to use our powers under the Act to pay two new grants to local authorities; and those grants cannot be paid without the specific approval of the House. That is why the supplementary estimates are being presented to the House today.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Before my hon. Friend pays the councils, will he make inquiries about the length of delay in issuing bills? Some councils will take longer than others. Will he also make inquiries into whether Labour councils are deliberately delaying issuing their bills until after Thursday, so that the public do not know the truth?

Mr. Key: It would be outrageous if Labour councils were doing that.

Mr. Wilshire: They will.

Mr. Key: However, the evidence is that councils are, on the whole, doing the best they can.

Mr. Wilshire: Some are.

Mr. Key: Some of them have made remarkable progress. Within a matter of days of the changes being announced, they had got their bills out.

As I have already said, front loading is only part of the picture. We also intend to use our powers under the Act to pay two new grants. The first will reimburse authorities for the direct loss of community charge income arising from the general reduction in charges. Of course, we shall not know until the end of the year exactly how much income each authority has lost, but we can make an estimate, and that is what we have done. Our estimate uses authorities' own figures for the amount of income they were expecting to raise from charges. So it takes account of their expectations about non-collection, ensuring that our grant does not simply bail out authorities that are poor collectors, and it also takes account of standard and collective charges.

Grant will be paid during 1991-92 to cover 90 per cent. of the estimate for each authority. Final payments, to bring the amount of grant up to 100 per cent. of actual losses, will be made next year. This year's payments will involve an increase in central Government support for the

current year of over £5 billion for Great Britain as a whole. We have already released the first instalments of community charge grant to local authorities. In order to permit that urgent expenditure, an advance of nearly £505 million has been made from the contingencies fund. That sum will be repaid to the fund when parliamentary approval for the additional expenditure has been obtained.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my hon. Friend make it quite clear to the House and to the councils generally that the advance of that money in no way releases local authorities from their responsibility to collect outstanding community charge which has not yet been paid?

Mr. Key: Yes, indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, and I can give him an absolute assurance that there is no question of an amnesty on the payment of tax due to local authorities. It is essential that all those in a position to influence non-payers use that influence to ensure that they pay. It would be grossly unfair to other law-abiding payers if that were not the case.

As I have said, we are paying only 90 per cent. of the grant this year. The remaining 10 per cent. will be paid after the end of the financial year, subject to any adjustments that may be necessary, on the basis of audited claims. That arrangement is based on a recognition that authorities' own estimates of the amount of charge income to be raised are subject to considerable uncertainty. In those circumstances, it would be wrong in principle to pay 100 per cent. of the estimated entitlement until an audited claim has been received. We recognise, however, that the holdback of 10 per cent. will affect the cash flow position of authorities. We have therefore taken that into account in advancing the payments from the business rate pool.

That brings me to the third measure on my list. We intend to reimburse authorities for all reasonable additional administrative costs incurred by them as a result of the recent legislation.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I must compliment the Minister on his smooth performance, but is it not the first time that the Gerald Ratner principle has been applied to legislation? The Government has had to admit to the House that the legislation under which local government finance has operated for the past two years is, to use Gerald Ratner's phrase, nothing better than a prawn sandwich. In the light of the additional administrative costs to local authorities, does the Minister intend to deduct those funds from all the ministerial salaries that have been concerned with the fiasco over the past two or three years, as Mr. Ratner would do?

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman made a particularly long intervention. I can assure him that if he were to reduce ministerial salaries by anything at all, there would be precious little left for the benefit of his constituents.

We are taking very great care to discuss with local authority associations what the basis and timing of payments should be. No decisions on that have been taken, but we expect that the cost to the Exchequer in the current financial year will be of the order of £60 million.

Apart from those three initiatives, we are taking the opportunity to adjust the public expenditure provision required for the existing community charge reduction scheme and the assistance which is given towards the preparation and administration costs of that scheme. Because of the £140 general reduction, the total amount of help that will need to be given through the reduction scheme will be reduced.

The resultant savings have made it possible to make a number of improvements to the scheme. The threshold for entitlement has been reduced from £104 to £52. Allowance is now being made for people who changed their address during 1990-91, and, for the first time, the scheme will take account of as many charges as there are eligible charge payers in a property. Those changes in the rules mean that some 18 million people will still qualify for a reduction under the scheme in the current financial year.

The cost of the revised community charge reduction scheme will now be £1·38 billion, which is about £450 million less than the figure announced in the local government finance settlement in January. As with community charge grant, 90 per cent. of that sum will be paid to authorities this year, with the balance of the grant payable after the end of the year on the basis of audited claims.

The changes to the reduction scheme will also affect the preparation and administration costs incurred by authorities in relation to the scheme. We are therefore seeking additional provision to cover the extra costs of amended computer software and other administrative expenses.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Before leaving the issue of adjustments and so on, will my hon. Friend consider a further point about the behaviour of some local authorities? Some in London say that the London borough of Lambeth has still not sent out bills for last year's community charge, and is therefore suffering a large shortfall in its community charge. It would be wise for my hon. Friend and the Department of the Environment to investigate that closely so that the truth can be found before the Government and the taxpayer make any payments to that borough. Other London boroughs may be in a similar position.

Mr. Key: I regret to say that my hon. Friend is right. The London borough of Lambeth has a substantial debt, not only from uncollected community charges last year but from uncollected rents and rates and a great deal of other income due to it. I suspect that it would be extremely unfair on those who live in the London borough of Lambeth if we were not to assist the borough to finance its services this year, considering that the borough receives a substantially greater grant than its neighbour—Wandsworth—because of its additional needs. I take my hon. Friend's point, and I hope that those in Lambeth responsible for these matters will take careful note of it.

The estimates will enable the Government to provide a substantial amount of additional assistance to local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales this year. They give effect to the commitment that we have made to reduce the burden on local taxpayers. I commend them to the House.

10.46 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The Minister said that these estimates are before the House because of the extra that people were paying, first in rates and then in massive poll tax payments. I remind the Minister that ratepayers and poll tax payers have paid more over the past few years because the Government have so drastically

[Mr. William O'Brien]

reduced the rate support grant that it was only reasonable that someone should have to pay more. Many people need and depend on the services of local authorities. The sorry fact is that it has taken the Government 12 years to realise that that has been happening.

We are debating a contribution to help local authorities with their expenditure. However, we think that it would be better to reinstate the rate support grant as it was before the Government took office than to operate this mis-mash of resolutions and proposals.

Mr. Wilshire: Before leaving his point about why people are paying such large bills, will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that one of the reasons for that is that some of his colleagues refuse to pay their community charge and have been stoking up many other people and encouraging them not to pay, so that the law-abiding citizens have had to pick up the tab?

Mr. O'Brien: We hear that story a lot from Conservative Members, who do not mention that rates were increasing long before the poll tax came into effect. The poll tax has been in operation in England for only a year and in Scotland for two years. The Government have discovered that it does not work, hence the need for the estimates.

On 25 March, the Minister of State announced drastic changes and hon. Members have been awaiting announcements or additions to the Order Paper today. We hoped to hear from the Minister that, from 1 April 1991, the Government would extend the 100 per cent. rebates for the poll tax to people on income support and to those whose incomes are such that they cannot afford to pay.

In his statement on 23 April, the Secretary of State, who I am pleased to see in his place, made it abundantly clear that the Government are now aware of the hardship that people on income support, students, student nurses, apprentices and people on youth training courses experience in paying their poll tax bills. The right hon. Gentleman promised that under the new council tax, which will be introduced in 1993, the maximum rebate for people on income support, students and trainees would be 100 per cent.

If the Government now recognise the hardship that people experience in paying their poll tax bills, why should they have to wait a further two years for 100 per cent. rebates? Ordinary people want an answer to that question.

Mr. Malcom Bruce (Gordon): Is not it unfair on people and absurd for local authorities to have to pursue 20 per cent. of a much reduced tax, when the cost of collection will probably exceed the revenue that will be secured? Does not that show how incompetently crazy the Government are?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, with which I shall deal later.

If the Government have recognised the need for 100 per cent. rebates, why not will they make them available from 1 April? Why cannot they be included in the estimates? Why does not the Secretary of State act immediately and offer them to those who are in greatest need?

The House is agreeing to expenditure of £4·8 billion from the Consolidated Fund to meet the cost of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill. The Chancellor of the Exchequer told us that, under that Bill, poll tax bills would be reduced by £140.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the people about whom he is talking do not need to wait for two years? If Labour authorities were to produce spending plans at target or less, those people would not only receive the 20 per cent. this year; they would receive more than that through their income support level. The people the hon. Gentleman wants to protect could be protected this year if the Labour authorities that are wastefully overspending stuck to target.

Mr. O'Brien: Those who are requesting 100 per cent. rebates are not found only in Labour local authorities. The Association of District Councils has suggested that there should be 100 per cent. rebates for those on income support and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the ADC is Tory-controlled. The hon. Gentleman's own colleagues are also asking for that consideration. Collecting the 20 per cent. could be more expensive than giving 100 per cent. rebates to those people. That is the craziness facing the local authorities, but it is not too late for the Secretary of State to make that adjustment and to allow relief to those who most need it while also reducing the administration costs of the local authorities.

The purpose of the three motions is to reduce the poll tax by £140 per person. They also relate to covering the cost of the changes that have been made to the poll tax reduction scheme that was announced by the Minister on 25 March. I believe that the Minister said that he would cover all the costs incurred by the local authorities that will be faced with extra work. Extra demands are being placed on their staff and resources because of making the changes that the Government have introduced.

I believe that, as part of the general reduction scheme, we should include 100 per cent. rebates for those who have suffered the greatest hardship as a result of the poll tax. That is the most important matter before the House. However, there is also the question of rebilling, to which the Minister referred, and of the delay in local authorities' receipt of the income that would enable them to meet their costs. Can the Minister be more realistic in assessing those costs?

If the cost will be met only at the end of the financial year when the audit is carried out, I must advise the Minister that that will create additional problems for local authorities, which may have to borrow to meet the cost of providing services. That will lead to interest charges, which will have to be taken into consideration when assessing the total cost of the extra charges and the extra calls upon the resources of the local authorities. I hope that that amount will be included in the total refund that is made to the local authorities. Has the Minister any updated figures for that cost? We were told that it could amount to £200 million of wasted taxpayers' money——

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): No.

Mr. O'Brien: I am prepared to give way to the Minister of State. If he is saying that it will not be £200 million, what is his most recent assessment of the cost?

Mr. Key: I am delighted to answer. In fact, I said that it would be £60 million

Mr. O'Brien: But the Minister then said that that was only an estimate. There has been no real attempt to ascertain the actual cost. I suggest that £200 million is a more realistic figure than the one that the Minister has given. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because local authorities are now making it clear that the Government have underestimated the real cost, and that their costs will be much greater than the £1, £1·50 or £2 per poll tax payer suggested by the Minister. The Minister of State has underestimated that figure. Bearing in mind the way in which the Government arrived at the figure of £60 million, one can readily accept that they have again underestimated and that they are not being honest or fair with the House or with the people outside.

The money that we are told will be paid to local authorities for the extra billing and extra work that must be carried out would be better channelled into providing improved education facilities, community care and health care. The money that is being wasted on paper that is churned out and then destroyed, on equipment that must be purchased so that bills can be sent out and on the recruitment of additional staff to make up for the Government's mistakes could be better spent on the services on which people rely. It is sorrowful and painful to consider that people are suffering because services are not being provided and the Government are wasting money in the way that has been outlined tonight.

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about services that the public are losing, but in his capacity as a Front-Bench spokesman, what advice would he give to the Labour authorities that are not sending out bills and that like the London borough of Lambeth, which I mentioned earlier, have not even sent out the bills for last year? Lambeth is one of the new inner London education authorities, and as such has responsibility for young people. What would he say to such a borough, which is not even attempting to collect the money from last year, let alone this year?

Mr. O'Brien: Send out the bills. If that is the advice that Conservative Members wish me to give, I give it.

There is a doubt about how many people will qualify for, and receive, the £140 reduction in the poll tax. The Budget brief presented by the Treasury on 19 March stated that one of the main features of the Budget was that the community charge would be reduced by £140 in 1991-92. The inference was that all community charge bills would be reduced by that amount. We are now told that that is not a realistic figure and we realise that the Chancellor's statement was wholly misleading. More poll tax payers will receive a reduction of less than £80 than will receive a reduction of £140. Five million pensioners will receive less than £80; 20 million poll tax payers do not qualify for the £140 reduction. They are the Minister's figures, not mine. The people who can afford to pay—such as right hon. and hon. Members—receive the full reduction. It is grossly unfair that people who receive the largest reduction are those who can afford to pay their poll tax, but that is the crazy scheme that the Government have introduced.

The Prime Minister and other Ministers have often told us that benefits that are available from Government sources and from tax sources should go to the people in greatest need, yet that principle does not apply to the poll tax relief scheme. If under social benefits the people in greatest need receive the greatest benefits, why should the same principle not apply with the poll tax rebates?

We shall not oppose the motions because money is being channelled into local government and local government needs that money. As I said earlier, that money should have been channelled through the rate support grant. That would have allowed local authorities to provide the services that are needed in their areas and that would have been a better way to provide local authorities with resources.

The £4·8 million should go to the people who need it most and the local authorities should decide how best the grants should be spent. That money could allow local authorities to provide better education and to repair and bring up to date schools that have not been painted or repaired for years because the Government have been reducing grants and resources to local authorities. We would prefer local authorities to spend the money in the way that they think fit. The money should allow local authorities to provide the community care and the sporting and recreational facilities that are so needed, particularly in rural areas. The Association of District Councils wants the resources to provide the services that are required.

We press the Government to redistribute the money and to provide other resources to allow local authorities to provide the service that people demand. On 19 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"I have concluded that . . . the level of the community charge is still too high . . . the community charges recently announced in England, Wales and Scotland will be cut by £140."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 180.]

That does not apply. The Secretary of State for the Environment has also said that the number of people receiving help will increase to more than 18 million next year. We are now told that the number of people who will receive the maximum rebate has substantially reduced. In a written answer on 17 April, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment stated:

"the reduction scheme . . . as already planned for 1991-92, is estimated at £86."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. *184*.]

The figures show that 14·6 million charge payers will receive less than £80 and 20 million will receive less than the £140 that the Government have claimed will be distributed.

We want a better redistribution of the money available to local authorities. Local authorities should have more freedom to provide the services that their communities are demanding. A Labour Government will ensure that that happens.

[Mr. O'Brien]

11.8 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It was interesting to hear the Minister discuss the Welsh situation. Clearly he is the Government representative who is the expert on what has happened in Wales. However, perhaps not many other hon. Members will realise just how ludicrous has been the pantomime of the rate reduction system that was introduced in Wales. A transitional relief system has been introduced and the Secretary of State for Wales confessed, showing rather more courage than sense, that the system is his brainchild.

I shall talk generally about the system and say how the Government started out by coming to the conclusion that it would be sensible to give reductions not on the basis of what people paid individually under the old rating system but on an area basis. That works out as very rough justice indeed.

I choose an area of Wales totally at random, the county of Monmouth. Strangely enough, it has the lowest reduction in all Wales—£4, compared with £82 in the Rhondda. That is £4 for an individual. Of course, there are people in the Rhondda who are very deserving of a reduction, but there are also people in the Rhondda who do not need a reduction at all. Many areas in Monmouth are very poor and will suffer because they are not getting that reduction. That is extremely rough justice, but when the system is broken down into individual parishes and communities it becomes even more demented. There is a degree of fairness if an area is homogenous—that is, if it is wholly rural or urban. In my patch of Newport, West we have a totally perverse result. Under the previous rating system, the areas where the rates paid per parish and per community were low are rural areas. That is for the good reason that the farms were derated. Although there might be 600 dwellings there, 300 of them may have been farms, and they were derated.

When the Government did their arithmetic they came up with the absurd conclusion that areas of deprivation and need were rural areas. In my constituency—the same applies to Newport, East—all the rebate goes to rural areas. We have very prosperous rural areas getting rebates of £50 and large council estates getting nothing. That has caused considerable puzzlement and resentment throughout the constituency. My local newspaper has carried many stories of people asking why on earth they should pay the £50 David Hunt levy, as it has become known, when prosperous areas down the road are paying nothing.

To give an example, under the old rating system, two people in a five-bedroom house were paying £1,500 in rates. Two people in a caravan a field away paid £12 in rates. Under the Tory tax, as described by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), they paid equal rates —quite unfairly, with two people in each house—of £460 each. Under the brave new world of the David Hunt levy there will be the generous boon and allowance from the Government; the £53 will go to the people living in the five-bedroom house and the people on the caravan site will receive nothing.

The system needs some attention. The Minister should give some assurance to those who have lost out and are losing out. Some areas, including Rogerstone, Allt-yr-yn, Bassaleg, Rhiwderin and Caerleon will get nothing. Areas such as the Christchurch road, Nash, Redwick, and the leafy world of Wentlooge are getting large handouts.

Those will be matters of some significance on Thursday, as the voters will demonstrate. Tonight we are considering a system which the Government, on their own estimate, say will cost £60 million. We can be very cynical about that figure. That is £60 million to pay for the Government's attempt to save their skin. This is really a Tory tax. If my memory serves me correctly, according to newspaper reports, that £60 million is more than the personal fortune of the Secretary of State for the Environment. Would not it be just if that money were paid not from the public purse but from the funds of either the Secretary of State or the Conservative party?

11.15 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Nobody will oppose the motion, as people expect to benefit from this reduction —and soon. However, a number of questions that did not arise when the announcement was made are beginning to emerge. There is a specific question to which I would appreciate an answer. The total amount involved in the three motions is just under £5·7 billion. We were advised that the yield from the Budget increase in VAT would be about £4·25 billion. It would be helpful to know how the difference is made up. The exercise that began in the Budget could have gone very much further. If it had, perhaps people would be clearer as to the exact scale of the manipulation.

The Government could have abolished local taxation altogether. Presumably people would have thrown their hats in the air and said, "Wonderful." But a few months later they would have begun to wonder how it was that their children continued to be educated in schools, that the streets continued to be swept, and that other services continued to be provided. The answer, of course, is that councils depend on Government grants to pay for those services. Indeed, that is how councils will increasingly have to be run.

The Government, having steadily reduced the grants to local authorities in an attempt to squeeze them, have, at one go, reversed their policy and thrown billions of pounds back at the problem. Secondly, they have maintained that this is central Government money. I wonder how often we have heard Ministers say, "We don't have any money; it is taxpayers' money." That is not what the Chancellor said when he made his Budget announcement. He said that he had made funds available from the central Exchequer. That is the difference. At the end of the day, people have to pay, by way of one tax or another, for their services, and the VAT increase was immediate evidence of that fact.

At the weekend, I discussed with an Environment Minister one of the interesting aspects of the new system. The Government say that the new property tax will not involve revaluation resulting from extensions or improvements to houses, as happened under the old rating system. On two counts, it appears that that is wrong. First, improvement could result in a valuation moving the house up a band or two. That would have a significant effect. Secondly, the cost of any major improvement would attract a substantial extra amount of VAT.

A single person with a £58,000 house in Strathkelvin and Bearsden, if he were to undertake a £25,000 improvement, would pay a council tax that was £147 more

than the community charge or poll tax figure, in addition to £625 in extra VAT. All I can say is, "Eat your heart out, Michael Hirst. When you find out about that, you won't come back to this place." I could give other examples, but I shall not do so. No doubt the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) will be happy if I do not go into cases affecting his constituency.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) made a very valid and relevant point. When the Chancellor made his announcement, many people thought that they would get a rebate of £140. It is all very well for Ministers to smile and say, "We all know that that was a reduction from the headline tax," but that is not what many people thought. Indeed, Charlie Gray, the convener of Strathclyde regional council, said that many people in that area thought that the tax had been abolished. The Tory tabloid press, which many of them read, told them that, effectively, the tax had been abolished: "Poll tax goes"; "Victory over the poll tax"; "Defeat of the poll tax". Only later did people realise that the tax had not gone and that they would not get reductions such as they expected.

It is extraordinary, especially at the point of change between financial years, that the Government have not abolished the 20 per cent. rule. They have got themselves into an absurd bind. In the case of Shetland Islands council, the most extreme example, the council could be obliged to collect 20 per cent. of 97p from people who have not paid their tax. The cost of billing would be absurd. Being sensible, the council is not wasting its time pursuing the matter, although it has been suggested that the council may be in breach of the law. I only hope that there are not absolute lunatics in the Scottish Office, and that it will not pursue the council. Even where 20 per cent. is £25 to £30, the cost of collection could be out of proportion to the amount due.

I have talked before about students who have spent short periods on courses—for example, at Robert Gordon institute of technology in Aberdeen, which has been successful in attracting students from Malaysia for three-month courses. The council has had to pursue people to Kuala Lumpur and to places in the jungle for amounts of £6 or £9. Because of the cost of recorded delivery to such places, it does not make sense to try to collect the money, but the director of finance says that he is legally required to do so. That may be an extreme example, but there is no doubt that the cost of collection in many cases is out of all proportion to the revenue involved.

The wear and tear on council officials who have had to deal with the incompetence of the Government should not be discounted. The officials have wrestled with the difficulties with great commitment and success. Conservative Members should not be too sweeping in their denunciation of councils which have been dilatory in collecting the tax. There are bad examples—Lambeth is a case in point—but there are many efficient councils.

My own council, Grampian regional council, was so efficient that it got its bills out before the Budget. As a result, it had to re-bill, at a cost of £250,000 in postage alone. In those circumstances, the officials should not be attacked by the Government. They have been victims of their own efficiency. Conservative Members, including the Secretary of State for Scotland, have criticised council officials for not being diligent enough in following up non-payers.

While the Government may feel that the immediate rescue of the £140 reduction in the headline tax and the introduction of the simplified council tax have got them off the hook, increasingly, as people study the proposals, they will find that there is another group of winners and losers. The Government will suffer because they will be hit by anomalies, rather unexpectedly, in their own heartlands. A growing body of opinion recognises the sheer incompetence of the way that the Government have gone about administering the tax and then the changes.

When pressed on "Newsnight" a few weeks ago, the Minister of State said that the cost of the change would be about a few hundred million pounds. When I heard that, and when I read in my local newspaper that the prospective Conservative candidate for my constituency had criticised the council for spending £9,000 on producing three editions of a newspaper giving council information during the year, I could not help but be struck by the gulf between that modest cost and the squandering of enormous amounts by the Government, which was dismissed in such a cavalier way.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Would the hon. Gentleman care to reflect on the position that persists in Edinburgh, where the university is being considerably embarrassed because of a deficit of about £20 million? Will he contrast the trauma that it is going through with the profligacy of the Government who are wasting good resources on trying to clear the poll tax problem?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman makes his point. Any hon. Member could make a variety of points about what could be done with the money instead of the waste that we have suffered.

The main conclusion we have to reach is that, in spite of everything, the shambles is to go on until 1994. The problem has not been resolved; we will have to live with it until 1994. In the meantime, we have to get to grips with yet another change.

The Secretary of State for Scotland maintained in an interview recently that he had no revolt on his hands. He said that he had always regarded the events of the past couple of years as a reasonable progression from the rating system to the lessons of the poll tax and on to a reformed property tax. I suppose that he could have argued that the first world war was a necessary expedient to ensure that women were given the vote. Everyone knows that the Secretary of State for Scotland has egg all over his face. He defended the poll tax to the last ditch, as did the Minister of State. Perhaps we shall suffer, because they will have the last laugh. After all, the poll tax will be implemented through the general election until 1994.

I hope only that the people will realise how incompetent the Government have been, how crazy was the way in which they changed the system and how we have not passed through the wood to an efficient working system that will enable local government to implement a buoyant and reliable method of raising finance under which people will be charged fairly for the services that they must receive.

11.25 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The estimates are stage 1 of the Government's inadequate attempt to remove themselves from the mess that has been created by the poll tax. There was mayhem when many local authorities had to produce a second set of bills, and the estimates take account of the costs of second billing,

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

but other problems have not been overcome. For example, when poll tax bills are sent out, assessments and calculations for poll tax payers are down and out, as it were, and there is no entry to the system. When bills are produced twice, the problems are exacerbated. For example, the circumstances of some payers will change because of alterations to their social security payments and other arrangements. During the billing, the local authority can do nothing to assist those whose financial position has changed. It is difficult for an authority to implement manual changes, because of the problems encountered in attempting to enter the system to obtain basic information. There were enormous problems when the Government plucked a new system out of the hat.

There has been talk about the 20 per cent. provision and £140. There are some who will enjoy the £140 provision under the new system, but they are the people who benefited from the introduction of the poll tax. In some instances, they were benefiting by thousands of pounds a year. At the same time, the increased prices that are the result of additional value added tax are picked up by all and sundry. In other words, there is no grand strategy to overcome the problems that were caused by the introduction and implementation of the poll tax.

Stage 2 of the Government's so-called policy lies in the dim and distant future. It might be reached by 1994, but it might not. Of course, a Conservative Government will not be in office in 1994. An alternative policy will be produced by a Labour Government. In the meantime, the Government's plans will fail to overcome the massive problems that have been caused by the poll tax.

The first motion refers to expenditure.

"in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses".

I stress again a massive problem which was created by the poll tax and which much thought is needed to put right. High expenditure is needed to alleviate the damage. The poll tax has had a disastrous effect on electoral registration. The figures show that, last year, 1·6 per cent. of the population of England, Scotland and Wales who were estimated to be over 18 were missing from the electoral register. People dived for cover because of the difficulty that they would face in meeting the demands on them. Sometimes, a member of a large household who was about to turn 18, thus becoming liable to pay the poll tax, did not sign the register.

Statistics show the numbers of 18-year-olds, of those over 18 and people on the electoral register. The number of people on the electoral register has fallen. The Government failed to produce district registration figures, although district council elections were to be held. It was apparent that electoral registration figures would not be available until after the elections. According to parliamentary answers, they were to be available on 10 May. We do not yet have the constituency figures. Theoretically, if the Conservatives do not do too badly in the local government elections, they may decide to call a general election and we would not know the electoral registration figures. That would be disgraceful.

After some pressure, the Government produced district registration figures on 25 April. They show that there is a continuing, if marginal, decline in electoral registration in England, Wales and Scotland, but not in Northern Ireland, which does not have the poll tax. Northern Ireland is in a healthy position in terms of the number of 18-year-olds coming on to the register for the first time, but the position in England, Wales and Scotland is disastrous.

Money should be provided in the estimates to tackle the problem. The Government should have given attention to this point in the review. They had said that nothing was ruled out and nothing was ruled in. I wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment offering to give information. About two months later, I received a letter from a junior Minister saying that the Department was sorry but it was too busy. Nothing was to be ruled out, but I was part of the nothing and I was ruled out.

Between 1987 and 1990, the percentage of the population on the electoral register fell by 1·5 per cent. in England and by 1 per cent. in Wales. Over a slightly longer period—because the poll tax was introduced in Scotland a year earlier—the number declined by 1·7 per cent. in Scotland. Between 1987 and 1990, electoral registration increased by 0·6 per cent. in Northern Ireland.

The position of those about to attain the age of 18 is far worse than it was at any time in the 1980s or 1990. The figure for attainers in Scotland has fallen from 52,000 last year—which itself was only 69 per cent. of the estimated population of 18-year-olds—to 47,000, compared with the 1982 figure of 70,000.

The same pattern is seen in Wales, although the reduction there is not so dramatic, probably because the effect of the poll tax in Wales has not been so marked as in England.

The attainer figure in England has collapsed between 1990—when it was at a low level anyway—and 1991 by 20 per cent., which has caused electoral chaos. Therefore, although the opinion polls may show that Labour and the Conservatives are neck-and-neck, that is not really the case. Such polls are based on random sampling and do not take account of who is and who is not on an electoral register. The 1·5 per cent. to 2 per cent. of voters missing from the electoral register are likely to be those who have most to fear from the operation of the poll tax—and you can bet your bottom dollar that they are also the people who would vote Labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I draw the attention of the hon. Member to the motion on the Order Paper because, although it refers to "certain related administrative expenses", the hon. Member's remarks are going beyond that subject.

Mr. Barnes: The motion clearly concerns expenses incurred in connection with the community charge in correcting errors in the system and other administrative expenses.

Madam Deputy Speaker: But not opinion polls.

Mr. Barnes: I was making the point that, whatever trend may be shown by opinion polls, there would be a very different result at the ballot box, with a 2 per cent. loss for Labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard enough about losses and gains. Perhaps we can hear more from the hon. Member about the estimates that are before the House.

Mr. Barnes: The estimates represent an attempt by the Government to overcome the vast problems that confront

them. If a Conservative Government continue in office, they will put other measures before the House to get themselves out of even more serious difficulties. Even if that is done, estimates will have to be presented to the House to ensure that something is done to defend this country's democratic system, which is based on electoral registration, and which has been seriously and deliberately hit by the Government.

11.38 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): It is fitting that I should follow my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) because he, together with my hon. Friends the Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), served on the Standing Committee that, three and a half years ago, considered the legislation that introduced the poll tax.

That Committee often sat until 2, 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. I suspect that it would have astounded the Ministers who piloted that legislation if they had known what would be occurring tonight. Tonight's proposals for reduction schemes, £140 relief by means of value added tax, and requests to local authorities to shred their bills and spend—or misspend—millions of pounds on putting right all that has gone wrong would have seemed a fairy tale to those Ministers.

Tonight the Government stand accused of a volte-face—of the biggest collective hypocrisy in 40 or 50 years of political history. Today's proceedings are wholly unnecessary and should not be occurring. The money that we have wasted and that we are proposing to waste is astounding. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) said, the community charge reduction scheme must be the dottiest scheme that we have come across in many years as far as Wales is concerned.

In Monmouth, which by chance happens to be the neighbouring constituency to mine, only four areas will get any relief through the relief scheme: Llantilio Crossenny, £4; Rogiet, £19; Caerwent, £6; and Tintern, £10. The rest of the boroughs, and most of the Welsh districts, will not receive the relief that they should have, according to the needs of the people within them.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): Two thirds will get it.

Mr. Murphy: The Under-Secretary of State says that two thirds of the community will get it. He does not take into account the people in those communities. The scheme makes no reference to their needs. They could be communities where many people are wealthy and a few are poor, or vice versa. At least the English scheme has the merit of considering the problems of individuals. The Welsh scheme has already been seen to be discredited, not merely by hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, but by all the Welsh local authority associations, which realise that they have made a mistake.

Mr. Bennett: Last year, the Welsh authorities asked for this scheme. Two thirds of all communities will get it and the £62 million available—£40 million more than last year—is all going to community charge payers. None of it will go on administration. It is a very good scheme.

Mr. Murphy: This year, the local authority associations have said exactly the opposite. They are saying that they were mistaken. They thought that the scheme would save money on administrative costs, which might have occurred a year ago. However, what has resulted is a unique unfairness, because people are losing out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West said earlier, the justice is extremely rough.

What is more important is that the scheme should have been unnecessary in the first place. We have effectively wasted nearly £80 million in the Principality by introducing a scheme which would never have been necessary had the tax been fair and just in the first place. That is the greatest indictment of this scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) has already referred to the fact that many people will not receive the whole £140. If, under the new and revised community charge reduction scheme, they were to have obtained £140 or more, they will get nothing. People on income support will not get their money. Some will have their bills cut by just £28, including pensioners in the Principality. People with the highest incomes will get most, and those with second homes—an aspect that is especially relevant in the Principality—could get as much as £280 a week off their community charge bills.

One aspect which has not been mentioned, and which hits the valleys in south Wales, is that many thousands of people who were eligible for home improvements and repair grants before this scheme now become ineligible. When we couple that fact, as we must, with the new means-tested improvement grants, the effects upon our valleys, which are trying to improve their areas with such grants and with other schemes, is calamitous. Had the Government thought a little more about their £140 off the scheme, the considerable poverty trap that exists in Wales could have been reduced.

The greatest indictment that falls upon the Government's shoulders must be the administration costs of the scheme. The money that the Government have squandered and wasted in Wales during the past three and a half years is a disgrace. They have spent £10 million more than necessary on introducing the scheme. The Government spent another £20 million more than they had spent prior to that on administering the rates. On top of that, they spent another £80 million on sweetening the poll tax. Over £100 million has been spent in Wales that might just as well, for what good it has done, have been dumped in the Bristol channel.

Only two days ago, the Secretary of State for Wales came to the Dispatch Box and boasted to the House of Commons about the money he was spending on two new hospitals in Wales. Had he not introduced this preposterous and discredited tax in Wales, we could have had another two new hospitals in the Principality. That is a measure of the disgrace that has resulted from the mess that the Government and the Welsh Office have got themselves into over the administration of the poll tax.

We do not, of course, intend to oppose this motion, but another £3 million is to be wasted by giving our councils that sum of money to administer this latest scheme. Welsh councils have had to shred their bills, re-bill and employ extra people. They have had to borrow at least £100 million in order to cover the cash flow loss that occurred as a result of the latest scheme. They have also had to pay back another £100 million in interest rates. The Government will have to find another £3 million—rightly so—to give to local authorities. That is money that could have been spent on many other things.

[Mr. Murphy]

The people of Cardiff will come to realise that they have to spend over £1 million a year—£5 for virtually every adult in the capital city of Wales—simply in order to keep alive a poll tax register that will have to linger on for another two or three years. It is a national disgrace for the people of Wales. It costs £5·5 million to administer the poll tax in the capital city of Wales—£26 for each charge payer.

The administrative cost of sending out many of the poll tax bills is far greater than the cost of the bills themselves. *[Interruption.]* Again from a sedentary position the Under-Secretary refers to the valuation registers. Let me tell him that only this week we discovered that the Government have asked the district valuation officers in Wales to use the 1973 valuation register as the basis for a secret valuation of properties in Wales, by means of which they can change the new banding arrangements to something different from what they announced to the House. The Welsh Office said that there should be seven bands, but it has already begun to tell the district valuation officers that there should be nine because it realises that seven is wholly unacceptable to the people of Wales. It would mean that the rich still got richer while the poor got poorer.

We are sorry that, during the past three and a half years, we have had to put up with a load of nonsense from Ministers, saying how marvellous the poll tax was. The fact is that £100 million of Welsh money has been wasted on putting through a measure that has now been abandoned. There are two years yet to go before something that is possibly even worse is put in its place.

11.47 pm

Mr. Key: In this short debate we have considered the need for additional funds to cover the costs that local authorities will face as a result of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act. I need hardly remind the House that the Act was the outcome of three days of concentrated deliberations both here and in another place immediately before Easter. The supplementary estimates for which we are seeking the House's approval also reflect an unusual procedure. This is not the time of year at which supplementary estimates are normally brought forward. I have explained the reasons. However, these unusual measures have had a most benign purpose. They will ensure that throughout the country the community charges originally set by local authorities will be reduced by £140. The speed of the House in concluding its deliberations enabled the reductions to be made. Tonight's deliberations will, I hope, authorise the payment of grant to compensate authorities for all of the £140 that they will not now receive.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) spoke about a volte face, or an about-turn. The only about-turn being contemplated is the Labour party's return to the rates using the 1973 valuations.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales has answered many of the points about Wales. I have great affection for Wales and for the people of Wales. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on carrying forward the success of his predecessor in transforming Wales into the flourishing and enterprising community it undoubtedly is.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) suggested going back to the local government finance regime of 1979. That would be a profoundly disagreeable prospect and we are certainly not contemplating it tonight. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) complained that the £60 million would be going directly to the charge payers of Wales. Many charge payers in Labour-controlled authorities, such as Lambeth, would be only too delighted to receive the community charge bills being distributed in Wales.

The hon. Member for Normanton asked me to accept that the estimates for extra administrative costs were far too low, but at present they are our best estimates of the costs of computer software, staff training and so on. However, I stress that we have asked local authorities to discuss them with us, we have asked them for their own estimates, for which we are still waiting, and, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, we have announced that all reasonable extra costs will be met.

The hon. Member for Normanton also asked whether authorities would be compensated for the short-term costs of borrowing. Of course they would, because compensation comes through advancing payments from the non-domestic rates pool, including an extra payment date on 5 April, as I have explained. In addition, payments of the community charge grant to cover the actual income lost began on 25 April.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether the Government had seen what he described as the error of our ways and why we did not reinstate the rate support grant. However, I can reassure him on that point. The revenue support grant for this year has already been made. It cannot be made again, so special arrangements are needed. That is the reason for the supplementary payments. Next year, the extra grant will be assimilated into the revenue support grant and distributed in the normal way.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we did not do away with the 20 per cent. minimum payment. We took the view that it was right to reduce the contribution made by all local taxpayers and hence the £140 reduction was made across the board. Those on income support continue receiving a level of support calculated to cover the 20 per cent. of charges. That support has not been reduced, so those people are getting a reasonable deal.

Mr. O'Brien: The abolition of the 20 per cent. minimum payment is an important issue because it will cost more to collect, particularly if it is paid in 10 monthly instalments. Does the Minister not realise that the situation is chaotic and that the minimum payment will cost more than it is worth in local authority administration? Why do the Government not accept that there is an urgent need to reconsider abolishing the 20 per cent. minimum payment by students and people on income support?

Mr. Key: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is making more of a political than an administrative point. The situation is not chaotic, but is being administered extremely well throughout the country. There seems to be little point in changing those administrative arrangements when the burden is not unfair and has been allowed for in the arrangements and when we are planning to change the local tax system. We fully intend to introduce the council tax in the year from 1 April 1993 and not in 1994 or 1995 —the date that Opposition Members have used in their scaremongering.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) complained of the lengthy delay in issuing bills. Perhaps that was a bit unfair.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Key: We are extremely short of time.

Mr. McKay: We have plenty of time for what the Minister has to say. Would it not be better for the Government to reconsider abolishing the 20 per cent. minimum payment? The treasurer of my local authority has assured me that the 20 per cent. costs much more to collect than the revenue it brings in. However, if local authorities do not collect the 20 per cent., they could be subject to surcharges. Would it not be possible at this stage to say that if it is foolish to collect the 20 per cent. and local authorities do not collect it, they will not be surcharged?

Mr. Key: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. The fact that we have now lowered the charge by a substantial amount should address most of the points that have been raised by hon. Members. I can do no more than repeat what I have already said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne was perhaps a little unfair. There is no evidence that any authorities have deliberately delayed issuing bills. For many, the issue of bills incorporating the £140 reduction could not be done before May, and we have had to accept that. Any authorities that delayed on purpose would be cutting off their nose to spite their face. It is simply money lost to the council, affecting the services that local authorities are keen to provide. The point about Lambeth was raised by several hon. Members. We are not compensating authorities that failed to issue bills last year. Some councillors are not aware of that. Entitlement to the new grant depends on collecting the balance due—no collection, no grant.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) spoke of £5·7 billion and the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred to only £4·35 billion. He inquired about the difference. That is a perfectly legitimate and straightforward question with a straightforward answer. The figure of £4·35 billion is the net cost after savings on the community charge reduction scheme. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the Shetlands. He suggested that in the Shetlands there would be a need for a bill of only 20 per cent. of 97p—the personal charge remaining after the £140 reduction. As he knows, that ignores the fact that water charges are also payable in Scotland. The water charge for the Shetlands is nearly £45. Therefore, revised bills will be somewhat larger.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) clearly believes in conspiracy theories. The electoral consequences of the community charge are his forte. The marginal decline in the numbers on the electoral register is not the consequence of the community charge. Most importantly, there is normal demographic change. The hon. Gentleman cannot fail to have noticed that numbers in schools fluctuate. Sometimes the numbers are up and sometimes we have falling rolls. Also, the hon. Gentleman must realise that there are special circumstances in Northern Ireland.

I totally reject the hon. Gentleman's assertions that Labour voters are tax dodgers. That was an outrageous suggestion. I was canvassing in Derbyshire last week at the same time as the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). We were on different sides of the same market in Ripley. I had no idea of the depth of loathing for Derbyshire county council and its Labour administration. It was an education for a Member of Parliament for a Conservative seat in the south to listen to the residents of that town speaking about their county council.

This has been an instructive and helpful debate. We must keep our eye on the fact that the consequence of what we are proposing will be a substantial relief for the local taxpayers, and I commend the estimates to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

CLASS VIII, VOTE 14

That a further sum, not exceeding £4,834,497,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £4,013,497,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on grants to local authorities in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses; on rate rebate grants; on emergency financial assistance to local authorities; and on repayments of excess contributions made by local authorities and other bodies in respect of non-domestic rates in 1990-91.

CLASS XV, VOTE 22

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £520,381,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £431,000,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Scottish Office Environment Department on grants to local authorities in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses; on rate rebate and transitional relief grants; and the special payments scheme to local authorities in Scotland.—*[Mr. Key.]*

CLASS XVI, VOTE 11

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £333,187,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £33,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Welsh Office on residual rate rebate for the disabled grants, grants to local authorities in Wales in respect of the community charge and certain related administrative expenses.—*[Mr. Key.]*

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the three foregoing resolutions relating to Estimates and Supplementary Estimates, 1991-92 by the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Francis Maude, Mrs. Gillian Shephard and Mr. John Maples.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 3) BILL

Mr Francis Maude accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1992: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 139.].

Commercial Whaling

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

11.59 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): We move from the land of Wales to the killing of whales, but of a different variety, obviously.

Earlier today, I sought to introduce a ten-minute Bill to abolish political honours. I enjoyed a minor triumph by winning the Division, thus depriving myself of any possibility of earning a K.

Political honours pale into insignificance compared with the subject of the debate—the future of the great whale and, specifically, whether commercial whaling will once again blight the planet. I sought the debate because of the growing concern that has been expressed by environmental and animal welfare groups about the possibility of a resumption of limited commercial whaling. Those groups, and indeed Members of Parliament, were alarmed by hints that the Government were retreating from their total opposition to allowing some whaling in certain conditions.

I do not intend to try to score political points; this is not a party political issue, nor am I seeking to make it one. Plenty of opportunities present themselves in the House for me to score points and turn issues to my advantage, but this is not one. I told the Minister outside the Chamber that I am seeking from him a cast-iron guarantee that in no circumstances will the Government agree to the killing of great whales, in the name of either so-called science or the far more open commercial reasons that are being advanced by the Japanese, Norwegians and Icelanders.

It is not an issue of whale stocks and conservation, or indeed of humane methods of slaughter; it is a matter of ethics. Whales are intelligent, social, warm-blooded mammals that are close to humans in the order of being. For any of them to be killed is a criminal act that cannot be justified or tolerated.

The alarm bells started to ring when the Secretary of State sent a letter on 27 March to Members of Parliament who had expressed an interest in the subject. He said:

"The situation is now that certain whale stocks are reaching levels where it will be difficult to say that controlled and highly limited catches of whales would harm the stock . . . If there were, at some point, a resumption of whaling, the technology used should be a genuine and qualitative advance on the older methods so that any whaling that takes place is as humane as it is possible to be. At this year's IWC"—

the meeting of the International Whaling Commission—

"the UK will therefore continue to press for a sound and scientific basis to the decisions of the IWC based on the principles of caution and safety, and that any future whaling is conducted as humanely as possible."

That is an ambiguous letter and it was not surprising that *The Sunday Times* subsequently ran an article under the headline, "Britain may back end to whaling ban". I am not an apologist for any journalist, but that headline, based on a reading of the Secretary of State's letter, was justifiable. But its impact in Japan was nothing compared with our feelings. We were outraged; the Japanese were overjoyed. I have extracts from Japanese newspapers that are in Japanese script. Fortunately, I have O-levels in Japanese and journalese and can translate them for the Minister.

The Japanese newspapers, in response to the letter of the Secretary of State and reaction in *The Sunday Times*, spoke of the United Kingdom turning away from the whaling ban:

"Minister Gummer made clear that the United Kingdom could change policy on the whaling ban . . . that the United Kingdom was reconsidering her policy on anti-commercial whaling . . . that Britain was ready to restart whaling. It will be a big relief for Japan, which is seeking to reopen commercial whaling."

That is what a Japanese newspaper stated. The Japanese were as delighted as we in this country were dismayed.

Obviously, the Secretary of State cannot be held responsible for misreporting in Japan, but it was the Secretary of State's ambiguously worded letter of 27 March to hon. Members that started the whole thing off. I have responded to that letter, expressing my surprise that he appended his signature to a letter that was clearly drafted for him by his civil servants. I await the Secretary of State's reply.

The Minister cannot be in any doubt about the sentiments in the House and the country about the killing of whales for whatever purpose. Nearly 200 hon. Members from all parties have signed early-day motion 697 on the subject. The first three signatories are from the three main parties. One of the co-signatories is in his place on the other side of the Chamber—the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden).

The hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and I went to No. 10 Downing street to present a protest letter to our Prime Minister. We then went to the Japanese embassy to present a protest letter to Mr. Kaifu, the Japanese Prime Minister, in which we said that the great whales belong to all of us on the planet and are not the private property of any particular country to do with as it sees fit. We await a reply from Mr. Kaifu, perhaps more in hope than expectation, that the Japanese Government will reverse their unbelievably selfish, unacceptable and arrogant attitude to the whales.

In the face of what is clearly widespread public concern in this country, the Secretary of State gave an interview to *The Times* on 26 April in which he stated:

"Britain will not support the resumption of commercial whaling until there is a method of killing whales humane enough to meet British animal welfare standards".

The Minister echoed that sentiment in a written answer to me on 25 April, in which he stated:

"We are not prepared even to contemplate agreeing to the lifting of the moratorium placed by the International Whaling Commission on commercial whaling unless and until it is clear that whale stocks are at healthy levels, a satisfactory management procedure is in place and the methods of killing whales are as humane as possible. These conditions have not yet been met."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 552.]

That answer does not satisfy me, many of the Minister's hon. Friends or the British public. Nobody is interested now in finding humane ways of killing whales any more than we are interested in finding humane ways of killing people. Both are totally unacceptable, and we should not be contemplating killing whales for any reason.

In response to Ministers' constant references to "humane ways of killing whales", I refer them to a new publication from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which is entitled, "The Cruel Seas—Man's Inhumanity to Whales". It details the different methods of killing whales, from the cold or non-explosive

harpoon to the grenade-headed or explosive harpoon. In the slaughter of minke whales, which the Japanese are still carrying out in the Antarctic, they are using a penthrite harpoon, which uses the explosive penthrite, which is six times more powerful than the black powder that is used in other explosive harpoons. All the technical jargon leads to one irreducible fact, that the whales die in absolute agony. The RSPCA document is interesting but horrific for anyone who is concerned about the welfare of whales.

Whales are social creatures with family structures. Who knows—perhaps, as one of their number is dying in intense pain with an explosive harpoon embedded in the flesh, others in the group may be suffering similar feelings of grief and fear as any of us would witnessing one of our family being gunned down by terrorists. Some people might regard that as an emotive comparison, but perhaps it is because we know so little about these magnificent and mysterious creatures that it is an act of criminal folly to kill them.

Anyone who has read Heathcote Williams' epic poem "Whale Nation" will have been moved by his description of the humpback whale's music or the awesome size of the blue whale, which is the largest creature ever to have lived on the planet and still be with us—but only just. It is only just with us because of the destruction inflicted on it. The whale nation described by Heathcote Williams which has been destroyed over the centuries stands as an indictment of all of us, now and in the past.

We used to turn all that beautiful animal life into commonplace household products, and now we see the Japanese, the Norwegians and the Icelanders killing minke whales to eat them—that is disgusting and unacceptable and it must stop. But the killing continues to this day. The Japanese, the Norwegians and the Icelanders get round the IWC's ban on commercial whaling by employing the name of science to continue their barbaric activities. That killing must be stopped.

I want the following assurances from the Minister in advance of the IWC meeting later this month. First, I want the Government to continue to oppose the lifting of the general moratorium on commercial whaling. I am sure that he can say yes quickly.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Banks: I see that the Minister is saying yes.

Secondly, I want an assurance that the Government will vote against any proposal to allow limited commercial catches of some whales, whatever evidence is advanced as justification by the Japanese the Norwegians or the Icelanders, who are the real villains of the piece.

The third assurance is that the Government will use their best endeavours to stop the Japanese, the Norwegians and the Icelanders from continuing their so-called "scientific" whaling.

Fourthly, should any of those countries quit the IWC, as Japan has threatened to do, in order to resume killing whales the Government should have urgent discussions with our EEC partners and with the United States Government so that appropriate sanctions can be imposed on any or all of those countries.

Lastly, the jurisdiction of the IWC should be extended to the small cetaceans—the pilot whales, the porpoises and dolphins—which are now being slaughtered in tens of thousands, mainly by the Japanese.

The Government have enjoyed unanimous support in the House for their opposition to whaling. This is one Government policy that I do not wish to see altered in any way. I ask the Minister to assure the House that the Government's policy will remain exactly as it is, that the Government will represent the House and the entire British people by saying that there will be no resumption of the commercial killing of whales and that the killing of whales carried out in the name of science will cease forthwith.

12.13 am

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) reflects the views of millions of people. I have had the privilege of seeing the magnificent whales in their natural environment in the seas off Alaska. Anyone who has done that or who has talked to people who have studied whales will know that they are highly intelligent, warm-blooded creatures with a social structure and could not justify their slaughter in any way. We know that whales communicate effectively. It is only a matter of time before human beings will communicate with them.

Future generations will look back in horror at the way in which we have treated whales in this and the previous century. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that the Government will remain firm in their policy and will oppose the resumption of any form of commercial whaling.

12.14 am

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I remarked in the office last week that it was about time that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had his Adjournment debate on whaling. I was not disappointed because it came up on the following week's schedule. I note what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has said. We had the same debate last year and there was no disagreement between us. I hope that we will be in the same position after this debate.

I ask the hon. Member for Newham, North-West to accept one proposition—that we are all committed to the conservation of the whale. The hon. Gentleman also referred to hints. I am sure that he will also acknowledge that, in the discharge of my responsibilities, I do not normally deal in hints. Indeed, that has been a problem with my responsibilites.

The argument is not about the classic great whales such as the right whale, the blue, the sperm and the humpback. The argument is about certain specific stocks of whales. I accept that for many people, and especially young people, the fate of the whale, like that of the elephant, is a symbol of man's acceptance that he is just one part of creation and that his role of dominance must lead him to accept the role of stewardship for the earth's diversity. I accept that proposition. However, how do we go about that?

We should not go about it by force. That is clearly not a practical proposition. We cannot use threats either. We must use persuasion and persistant and powerful presentation of sound arguments. The forum for the

[Mr. David Curry]

arguments is the International Whaling Commission. We have an important reason to keep the whaling countries in the IWC. The alternative—this is a real alternative, not just a hollow alternative—is that they might pull out of the IWC and form their own organisation and set their own rules. If they did that, there would be one big loser—the whale. Commercial whaling would resume, perhaps in considerable volumes.

How we persuade those countries to stay within the IWC is a practical political question. How do we maintain the moratorium? I must make it clear to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West that the Government's policy has not changed in that regard. We stick to the long-established terms of reference of the IWC. That body's great achievement was the moratorium on commercial whaling of the mid-1980s. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said, certain forms of whaling continue under that. Aboriginal whaling continues even in the Alaskan waters. There is also research whaling, some of which, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said, is effectively a form of disguised commercial whaling. However, the take has declined, even in research whaling.

At Reykjavik we are fully committed to the continuation of the moratorium. The IWC is working to achieve a series of long-established objectives which have not changed. All members of the IWC are formal subscribers to those objectives, the first of which is a comprehensive assessment of the state of the stocks, including the Antarctic minke, the central Atlantic minke and the grey whale. The latter is not in commercial contention, but there is a need to find out more about it. It tends to live in waters close to the United States and the Americans are anxious to collect further information about it. These assessments have been carried out.

At the meeting this month, the commission should hear reports on assessments of the other stocks which are in contention, such as the north Atlantic minke. An assessment last year, on the north Atlantic fin whale and on minkes in the Okhotsk sea, which is off Japan, was sent back for further work, to come forward to the commission again this year. Those stocks are being assessed this year.

Mr. Tony Banks: The assessment that is taking place is not to try to find out more scientifically about whales so as better to understand their lifeform, their welfare and all the other aspects to which the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) referred, but to establish whether it is possible once again to opt for more commercial whaling of that species. That is the whole point. We do not believe that there should be any killing of whales in any circumstances. The science is not about the understanding of whales; it is about whether the Japanese can be allowed to kill them in larger numbers than they do already.

Mr. Curry: I accept that point. Of course we do not have the power to stop whales being killed. The object of the exercise is how to achieve the maximum conservation of whales. Our judgment is that we must keep the debate in that forum. If we say that that forum is now to be used for a wholly different purpose from that for which it was set up, countries that wish to whale might walk out. I cannot judge what assessment they will make of the risks of doing that. That is for their own judgment. However, if they were to resume, we might end up with more whales being killed than otherwise. The judgment to be made is how, within that forum, we are able to persuade those countries that whaling is not in their broader interests. That is the task in front of us. I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

If we allow the debate to escape from the International Whaling Commission, we shall risk the whale being the loser, and nobody would accept that. The management of that dilemma is a difficult political decision, but we must address it. It is clear that the Japanese, the Norwegians and the Icelanders are members of the International Whaling Commission so as to achieve an agreed international rule for resumed whaling of the minke and the fin whale stock. We are not fools. We know that that is the purpose. In a sense, that is what the constitution of the organisation says, so that is a legitimate expectation on their part.

The question is how, within that framework, we move on the debate. Our position is perfectly clear. The United Kingdom believes that the present state of work does not permit us even to contemplate the resumption of commercial whaling. Three vital questions must be addressed. The first concerns the re-establishment and conservation of healthy whale stocks; the second, the fully developed management procedure; and the third—the hon. Gentleman has said that he regards it as irrelevant, but we think that it is important—the methods of killing.

Those criteria have not been fulfilled. Therefore, the question whether whaling should resume ceases to be scientific and becomes ethical. It is not even on the agenda at the moment, because the clear criteria that we wish to debate have not been fulfilled. On those scientific grounds, we believe that no case is made out for the resumption of whaling. The first reason for that is that the revised management procedure is not yet fully elaborated. Indeed, the options will not be presented to the commission until the end of May. Even if a possible procedure is identified or decided upon, or if some procedures are shortlisted, there will still be much work to be done. On top of that, enforcement and related arrangements must be addressed. There is a considerable volume of work, even in satisfying criterion No. 1, to be done. Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged, we are not satisfied with the slaughter methods that are used.

We are going to the International Whaling Commission meeting with clear criteria and with a clear objective. Our objective is to hold it together so that we keep the debate within the practical political forum that has now been established and that has a good track record in reducing the hunting and harvesting of whales. In fact, it has the moratorium to its credit. As there is no other forum, there is no reason to bust that one.

I emphasise that there is no question of our agreeing at Reykjavik to the resumption of whaling. We must persuade the whaling nations that it is in their interests to stick with the international approach. Equally, it is in our interests to stick with the international approach. If either we or other countries walk away, both will lose. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about how the whale is seen and about its particular qualities as an animal. But the biggest loser, if there were to be a departure from the international approach, would be the whale itself.

It is perfectly legitimate to say that this matter should be tackled on the basis that it is directly ethical, directly emotional, or directly moral. Clearly, however, we have to

use a coherent political process to give expression to that concern. That is the only means that we have. Declaiming does not save one whale. We must maintain the political engagement. That is how, in the past, we have managed to save whales, and I believe that it is how we shall do so in the future.

Mr. Tony Banks: Consider the argument that has been going on about Antarctica. What is to stop any country from going into Antarctica to mine? What would the British Government or the United States Government do if some country were to say, "We do not care that all these nations say that this should be a wilderness park. We are going in"? Why should not we adopt towards the whale the same attitude as we adopt towards Antarctica? Why should we be blackmailed by the Japanese? In effect, the Japanese are using blackmail. They are saying, "If the IWC does not do what we want, we will quit it, and will go out and kill whales." Should that kind of blackmail be allowed?

Mr. Curry: If we were to adopt the attitude that, on that basis, all the work of this organisation should be set at naught, they would say that we were using blackmail. We cannot just sweep to one side all the work of the IWC on the purely ethical ground that we want total prohibition, for reasons that go beyond any of the criteria that brought us into the organisation.

As I have made clear, the United Kingdom Government do not want to see whaling resumed. It is not my purpose to argue the Norwegian case, the Icelandic case or the Japanese case, and I have no interest in doing so. I do have an interest in trying to conserve the whale. Not for a moment do I impugn the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman, and I am being absolutely genuine when I ask what we could do if those countries were to walk out of the IWC and start whaling. We could not send a gunboat to stop it. Clearly, force is not a practical option. Some may ask about the possibility of economic sanctions. Let us not forget that there is aboriginal whaling in the United States. I find it difficult to imagine that, in that case, economic sanctions would be a practical proposition.

We are left with the option of trying to operate the system as we find it, of using the only forum that exists for this purpose. The British Government's position is clear. Our policy has not changed. At Reykjavik, we shall oppose the resumption of commercial whaling. I was at a meeting in Oslo less than a fortnight ago, and whaling was very much at the top of our agenda. I explained directly to the Norwegian Minister the force of the argument and the power of the emotion that goes into British people's beliefs about whaling. I asked her to realise that this is a matter of great importance to her country. We must continue the negotiations. Their purpose is absolutely clear. It is to make sure that there is no resumption of commercial whaling in Reykjavik. We maintain that forum, and we maintain the framework in which we have managed to do a great deal for the whale. We continue to preserve it as one of the rarest animals in our creation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 1 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY BILL *[Lords]*
Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shipbuilding

1. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will detail the vessels which are being constructed in United Kingdom shipyards with financial assistance provided by way of the European Community's seventh directive on the shipbuilding intervention fund; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): On 31 March 1991, 42 vessels were being constructed in United Kingdom shipyards with support from the shipbuilders intervention fund in England and Scotland and from intervention grant aid in Northern Ireland. This represents a total tonnage of 586,971 tonnes and a total value of £654·7 million. Assistance contributes £116·4 million or 17·8 per cent.

Dr. Godman: May I thank the Minister for his generous efforts on behalf of Scott Lithgow in attempting to have that shipyard redesignated for intervention subsidy? I am angry and deeply disappointed about the miserly reaction of Sir Leon Brittan. That conceited Commissioner should be told that United Kingdom shipyards deserve the same sympathy as is shown to the shipyards of other nations. Will the Minister use his good offices, and those of his colleagues in the Department of Energy, to ensure that Scott Lithgow obtains some of the offshore work? That must be better than such work going outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his plaudits. He is right that we approached Sir Leon Brittan, who told me when he came to see me last month that he was unable to compromise on the matter and that shipbuiding intervention funds would not be available to Scott Lithgow under article 7 of the seventh directive until 1994. I shall certainly approach my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Energy on behalf of the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman may have been a bit harsh on Sir Leon Brittan, who faces demands from the rest of the Community for increases in shipbuilding subsidy. There is also a problem in the German shipyards as the German Government have decided to give no subsidy whatever to any shipyards in what was West Germany.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I congratulate the Minister and ask him to confirm that the restructuring of British shipbuilding means that it is imperative that other European nations continue to reduce their subsidies so that we have a level playing field. He knows my deep interest in Appledore shipyard. Will he confirm that his Department is doing everything that it can to help that small shipyard on which so much employment regeneration rests?

Mr. Leigh: I know that my hon. Friend, who has come to see me on the matter, speaks up strongly on behalf of Appledore yard in her constituency.

Mr. Morgan: What is the Minister going to do about it?

Mr. Leigh: I shall tell the House what I am going to do about it. Appledore is in receipt of shipbuilding intervention funds and if it were to apply for the home credit guarantees schemes, we would consider that. My hon. Friend is right. The figures that I read out show that we subsidise shipbuilding to the maximum extent allowed by the European Commission. Given the problems of the former warship yards, particularly Swan Hunter and Cammell Laird—I see the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in his place—it is clearly in the interests of those yards that we end subsidies as quickly as possible.

Mr. Frank Field: On behalf of the stewards at Lairds, may I thank the Minister for his efforts in trying to secure intervention funding? The stewards have asked me to ask the Minister whether they are right in assuming that the British Government pay the intervention funding, not the European Commission. The stewards wish to know what would happen if the British Government decided to pay the intervention funding without the approval of the Commission.

Mr. Leigh: It is indeed the British Government who pay the intervention funding. The hon. Gentleman has asked me to do something difficult which we have not considered doing before—to go against the explicit direction of the European Commission. For such a communautaire Government as we are, that would be an inappropriate and wrong thing to do.

Kuwait (Contracts)

2. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many British firms have obtained contracts in Kuwait; and what is the estimated value.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): I am aware of more than 35 companies which have obtained contracts worth over £140 million in connection with Kuwait reconstruction.

Mr. Dalyell: In relation to reports about torture and human rights, is there a p[illegible]n'orth of difference between those whom we went to expel from Kuwait and those whom we went to defend? Do not we have to face up to the fact that Kuwait is now paralysed and that there is no chance of those who are there tackling the problem of the

fires? Ourselves, the Americans and the Saudis should go in, take charge and do something about what is a major engineering project which cannot be left to relatively few firefighters in commercial terms.

Mr. Lilley: It is clear that excesses have been committed since liberation and the British Government have made their views on that clear to the Government of Kuwait. If the hon. Gentleman sees no difference between the appalling outrages committed by the Iraqi Government and army and the excesses that have been committed since liberation, he has extraordinarily confused vision.

Mr. Rowe: In my constituency lives the managing director of Reynolds and Wilson, a company which has been placed on the American blacklist. The Americans have told him that they have no evidence of malpractice and that there is no particular reason for the company being on the list, but that they do not intend to remove it. The company, which has traded in that part of the world for 60 years, is having the greatest difficulty winning contracts simply because of the Americans' disgraceful behaviour. Has my right hon. Friend any comfort for that company and others like it?

Mr. Lilley: I assure my hon. Friend that my officials are discussing the matter with the United States authorities and are awaiting further information from them. I can reassure my hon. Friend that so far three firms have been taken off the blacklist and I expect others to be taken off in due course.

Mr. Gordon Brown: What possible help can it be to exporters to Kuwait or anywhere else to proceed with privatising parts of the Export Credits Guarantee Department? Now that there is no serious British bid, will he abandon the sale, which the British Exporters Association says is a shambles and which could put control in Rome or Amsterdam? This could become the second Government Bill to be rejected in another place within days. Frankly, it is privatisation for privatisation's sake.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that in the European Community export credit facilities are issued by private sector companies in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Belgium, Portugal and Spain and that Denmark and Ireland are also considering privatising their export agencies, because they believe, as we do, that export credit for short-term business should be in the private sector. We believe that that is more in tune with the single market and it is in accord with our view that the private sector should be responsible for such matters. The hon. Gentleman thinks that all European countries are obsessed by dogma, but it is the Labour party alone which believes that this should be in the state sector.

Sir Anthony Grant: Although I appreciate that my right hon. Friend wishes to help British firms in this context —he is doing a good job—will he bear in mind the interests of our allies who supported us during the Gulf conflict? For example, I have a constituent who works for an Australian company with special expertise in putting out appalling oilfield fires such as those to which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that there will be sensible co-operation with such companies?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, I shall do so. I have passed on the information that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked me to refer to the group competing for contracts in the oilfields. There is every reason to believe that a group of British companies will be awarded the contract for damage assessment in one of the oilfields which is expected to lead to substantial contracts for extinguishing and capping burning wells and restoring oil production. Discussions on that continue with the Kuwait authorities.

Timeshare

3. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he is taking to eliminate unscrupulous timeshare sales practices.

Mr. Leigh: I have asked the Commission of the European Communities to prepare a directive to regulate the selling of timeshare properties. In addition, we propose to amend the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to tighten controls on statements about services and to bring timeshare award schemes within the Act's powers.

Mr. Hogg: Is not it a disgrace that it has taken so long to make such little progress with what amounts to a massive abuse by this so-called industry? Is the Minister aware that many thousands of people are receiving so-called prizes such as motor cars? This very day, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has won a "prize" of a motor car. He would tell the House about it himself, but he is a shy and retiring fellow. Will the Minister assure us that his proposals will come into force quickly and that timeshare cowboys will be booted out of British business life?

Mr. Leigh: To some extent, I share the hon. Gentleman's impatience. The problem is that about 80 per cent. of timeshare properties are located abroad, so it is pointless for us to act unilaterally. We must persuade the Commission to introduce a cooling-off period and demand that companies provide a written prospectus and protect deposit moneys. I demanded just that when I went to see Commissioner van Miert a couple of weeks ago. I agree that receiving junk mail through the post is one of the curses of modern life, but one can apply to the mailing preference service, which covers 80 per cent. of such mail, to have one's name removed. Indeed, one can apply to have junk mail from Walworth house stopped if one wishes. It promises a place in the socialist sun, with reduced taxes and increased services. The British people should demand not only a written prospectus but protection of deposit moneys.

Mr. Colvin: If my hon. Friend is saying that self-regulation is the best way of proceeding, does he think that the new Timeshare Council is likely to be any better than the Timeshare Development Association that it replaces? Given what he said about 80 per cent. of properties being purchased abroad, does not he think that European legislation would be the answer rather than national legislation?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is right. We welcome the formation of the Timeshare Council, which I helped to launch last week. Self-regulation has an important part to play, but we have a right to demand that the timeshare industry puts its house in order. There is nothing wrong

with the product, but we receive many complaints—indeed, more complaints than on any other subject—about the selling techniques of timeshare operators. The Government are right to act.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Minister has had a damning report on this industry from the Office of Fair Trading since July last year. Why has he done almost nothing? Why is he still permitting misleading mailshots to this country, from which businesses in this country profit? Why does not he act now to ensure that people who receive the mailshots do not have to go to misleading and high-pressure sales in timeshare offices? Why does not he close offices that do not meet the standards that the public demand?

Mr. Leigh: The Director-General of Fair Trading has power to act under the Control of Misleading Advertisement Regulations. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, award schemes are not covered by the Trade Descriptions Act. I have said that we intend to amend that Act. Unfortunately, Under-Secretaries cannot introduce legislation within a couple of months. We shall have to await our place in the legislative slot in the next Session or the Session after. The hon. Gentleman failed to say that 80 per cent. of timeshare properties are located abroad, so there is a limit to what we can achieve nationally. We must act with the help of a European directive, and the Commissioner has promised to take up my suggestion that he should introduce one.

Car Industry

4. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the inward investment in the United Kingdom car industry.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The Government warmly welcome inward investment in the car industry.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the presence of three Japanese car manufacturers in this country clearly shows the success of the Government's policy in encouraging foreign investment in Britain?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Japanese are perhaps the most shrewd international investors and the fact that they concentrate so much of their European investment in Britain shows that the Government's tax regime, for companies and individuals, and the framework of industrial relations law that we have created provide an excellent climate for industry, especially for manufacturing industry.

Mr. Hoyle: Despite the inward investment, does the Minister realise that demand for motor cars in this country is low? Indeed, 340 dealers went to the wall last year. Ford has announced 1,000 redundancies and matters will be made worse by the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax. Does the Minister agree that despite the increase in exports, if there is not a strong home demand for cars more redundancies, more short-time working and cuts in investment, training and research and development will follow? That will not augur well for the future of the British motor industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would applaud—as I do—the great success of the industry in increasing its exports. The Nissan factory expects to export about 80 per cent. of its production in the current year and that is having a healthy effect on not only employment but the balance of payments.

Sir Hal Miller: Does the Minister accept that for inward investment in this country to be brought to a successful conclusion, it is essential that the industry's products are freely traded throughout the Community? Can he assure us that that is accepted by the Commission and by the member states?

Mr. Sainsbury: I agree entirely that it is essential that cars produced in the United Kingdom are freely traded throughout the European Community. I assure my hon. Friend that cars produced, for instance, in the Nissan factory to which I referred are as much European cars as are cars produced by a company owned by General Motors or by Ford in any part of Europe.

Tootal Group

5. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the proposed takeover of the Tootal Group by Coats Viyella to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): On the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided not to refer the merger. The House will recall that when a previous proposal was made for a merger between these two companies there was a full inquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Evans: Is the Minister aware that that reply will be received with considerable dismay by all Tootal employees, especially those at the Slimmashirt factory in St. Helens? What on earth is the point of his going up and down the country making speeches that cast doubt on the wisdom of hostile takeovers when, in practice, he is not prepared to do anything about them? Bearing in mind the recent Polly Peck fiasco, does he agree that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission could have investigated the amount and integrity of Coats' profits which emanate from South American sources about which shareholders clearly know very little?

Mr. Redwood: In its previous inquiry, the MMC considered all the relevant issues, many of which are the same as under the current proposal, which led to the director general's advice. The speeches that I have made about the virtues and wisdom, or otherwise, of contested takeover bids were aimed at shareholders. In this case, no matters of public interest need investigation. There are many matters for shareholders which can properly be dealt with by them. I am sure that the shareholders of both companies will read the record of these exchanges and other matters, including an early-day motion, and that they will be aware of the House's view when they make the important decision about the future of the two companies.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Those of us who take a great interest in the textile and clothing industry will have the greatest regard for Coats Viyella, for its role in the industry and for the reputation of Sir David Alliance in seeking to maintain a meaningful and proper place for the textile and clothing industry in the United Kingdom economy. But is not my hon. Friend concerned that a

monopoly will be created? How many other thread manufacturers will remain in the United Kingdom should the merger go ahead? What impact will the merger have on employment, which is critically important to the north-west of England?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments in the first part of his question. The question of sewing thread was addressed fully in the previous report. The advice of the MMC was adopted and the correct action was taken to deal with that potential competition detriment.

The issue of employment was also tackled in the previous report. If I remember rightly, the report said that both companies then thought that there would be some job losses through natural wastage resulting from the rationalisation, but that subsequently there would be more opportunities for new jobs. In the new bid, the two sides take a different view on jobs. The director general does not believe that there is a major matter for investigation in the public interest, but of course the jobs issue should be debated by the shareholders. I presume that the shareholders will want a successful enterprise and that will include winning business, which creates jobs. The only guarantee of a job is to have business which people want to take up and customers to buy the goods.

Mr. Henderson: Before a decision is taken on the matter, will the Minister accept that the textile industry has been particularly badly hit by the recession? Is not he concerned about the fact that hundreds of jobs have been lost, on a weekly basis, in communities that depend heavily on the textile industry such as Colne Valley, Batley and Spen and Keighley in Yorkshire and Pendle and Bolton in Lancashire? Does the Minister believe that those job losses have been caused by high wage settlements or, on reflection, does he believe that interest rates may have had a bigger impact?

Mr. Redwood: The decision to which the question refers has already been taken. My right hon. Friend has announced his decision. Like the hon. Gentleman, I regret job losses wherever they occur. I should need to look at each individual case to decide what lay behind those particular job losses. However, a successful textile industry depends on the right goods servicing customers. I must point out the recent examples of inward investment in the textile industry; as with the motor industry, people see that Britain is a good place in which to invest and a good place from which to export.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: While not taking any side in the bid between Tootal and Coats Viyella, my hon. Friend will be aware that the financial strength of the bidder can be bolstered by the use of pension fund surpluses. Many of my colleagues and I are most concerned about that. Surely the primacy in pension fund surpluses must belong to pensioners past, present and future. Will my hon. Friend consider that practice?

Mr. Redwood: The question of gearing was considered by the director general when he reached his decision to advise against a reference. The specific question about pension fund liabilities is governed by other regulations and laws. Regulations prevent the inappropriate use of surpluses and there are rules to ensure that the interests of pensioners are looked after. After all, that is the whole point of a trust fund. It must ensure that moneys are available to meet future pension liabilities.

Royal Mail

6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the chairman of the Post Office to discuss reorganisation and possible privatisation of the Royal Mail.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend will be meeting the chairman of the Post Office on Tuesday 11 June.

Mr. Hain: Having created separate Post Office Parcels and Counters companies, and with the current reorganisation of the Royal Mail—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—into nine regional businesses—

Hon. Members: Reading.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has only just arrived in this place. We should show consideration for our new colleagues.

Mr. Hain:—and with the current reorganisation of the Royal Mail into nine separate businesses on a regional basis, together with an additional number of separate business centres, despite the known opposition of a certain person whose name and head appears on stamps, will the Secretary of State agree to consult that certain person before he proceeds with his disastrous programme of privatisation of the Post Office or any sectors of the Royal Mail?

Mr. Leigh: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to our exchanges. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Yes, I was reading that bit.

What is important is not whether the Post Office is in private or public hands, but that the public obtain the quality, choice and value for money that they demand, within the context of a uniform, affordable structure. We have repeated those commitments many times. The matters to which the hon. Gentleman has referred are purely operational; they are not a prelude to privatisation.

I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman. Given his career, I would have expected him to be more open-minded. If it is true that certain parts of the Post Office might profit from more competition, and that more value for money might be achieved, what is wrong with that?

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem with the Post Office is not that it is not technologically advanced—it is—but that the trade unions have made poor progress in adjusting to modern conditions and equipment? Does he agree that they really must adjust to modern working practices much more quickly, for the benefit of all of us who use the postal system every day of our lives?

Mr. Leigh: That is exactly why the monopoly is a privilege and not a right. That is why it is always appropriate for the Post Office—which is responsible for operational matters—to examine every part of its activity to see whether more choice and value for money, and better quality, are possible. Opposition Members, of course, never accept that. They are the reactionaries, the Bourbons of this debate; we are the Orléanistes, the

pragmatists, ready to consider any kind of proposal from the Post Ofice that is aimed at improving the quality of service for the customer.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Normally, I try to reach question 9 by 3 pm; we have only reached question 6. May we have briefer questions and briefer answers, please?

Steel Industry (Scotland)

7. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to meet the chairman and chief executive of British Steel to discuss the future of steel making in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and my noble Friend the Minister for Industry meet the chairman of British Steel from time to time to discuss matters.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Minister accept that the information given to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on 6 December by the chairman of British Steel —that the European Commission would oppose any sale of Ravenscraig—was incorrect? Is he aware that, on 25 March, the Secretary of State for Scotland was not only given that information by the European Commissioner, but told that Scholey himself knew that he had gone too far in his evidence to the Select Committee? Can the Minister explain why the Secretary of State for Scotland has not given that information to the House of Commons, the Select Committee or the general public?

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Salmond: Now that the key reason given by British Steel for not selling Ravenscraig has been discredited, will the Minister intervene to force such a sale before the assets are destroyed by the private-sector monopoly that he has created?

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend is considering his reply to the Select Committee, and will give that reply by 14 May, which is the deadline for it. There are two matters that are specifically for his consideration, and he will deal with them when he produces his full and considered response.

I cannot answer for the chairman of British Steel in regard to the evidence that he gave the Select Committee; that must be taken up with him. If the hon. Gentleman has any questions for the Secretary of State for Scotland, I suggest that Scottish Question Time would be a better opportunity for him than Trade and Industry Questions.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend meets Bob Scholey, will he tell him that Conservative Members respect the way in which he has so dramatically changed the fortunes of British Steel? He has made it profitable and increased productivity, and the company is now a net exporter of steel. We have no intention of insulting him or the work force, as the Scottish National party has done.

Will my right hon. Friend also tell Bob Scholey that we expect British Steel to honour its commitment to sell the Scottish plants, on the ground that it has no use for them?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He is right to point out that the Scottish National party has upset the trade unions in this case, which, I am sure, is a matter of concern to the House. He is also right to point out that British Steel's success under its management in the private sector has been phenomenal. It is a world beater—a very profitable and productive company, which has transformed the fortunes of our steel industry in the past few years. I should have thought that most sensible Members of the House would welcome that, and would support the management that had delivered the goods.

Dr. Moonie *rose*—

Mr. Douglas: Make way for the well-known steel worker.

Dr. Moonie: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman's brain is as large as his body. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. A question please.

Dr. Moonie: We appreciate the fact that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is trying to match the Prime Minister in dithering. As he has now had the Select Committee's report in his hands for some time, can he tell us what action he proposes to take?

Mr. Redwood: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was good at anatomy, but his first remark implies that even that is not his strong subject. I can promise the hon. Gentleman that we shall make a considered reply to the Select Committee within the due time, but I cannot tell him what my right hon. Friend will say, because he has not yet finalised his response. If he had finalised it, it would now be available. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, and the House will want a considered and full reply, and that is what my right hon. Friend will produce.

Mr. Grylls: Will my hon. Friend remember and remind his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that he is no longer the owner of British Steel and that British Steel's owners are now the many thousands of people who work in that company, as well as the many thousands of small and, no doubt, larger shareholders around the country? Does he agree that British Steel has been successful because politicans have not interfered in it during the past few years, and will he—as I am sure that he will—resist any temptation to do so in the future?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who is right that we need a productive and successful industry to provide the jobs that we all wish to see in the steel sector. It is remarkable how much more successful British Steel has been since politicians stopped issuing lunch-time directives and making direct interventions in its management, and that is how we intend to continue.

CBI (North West)

8. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the north-west regional CBI to discuss the recession in industry.

Mr. Lilley: I have no present plans to meet representatives of the north-west regional CBI, although my officials do so regularly, and on Monday I met the CBI's presidential committee.

Mr. Bradley: May I suggest that the Secretary of State arranges an urgent meeting with the CBI to discuss the

disastrous fall in manufacturing employment in the north-west? After two Tory-inspired recessions, manufacturing employment has fallen by an appalling 301,000, which is a colossal 31 per cent. When he has that urgent meeting with the CBI, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the CBI that the Government have abandoned their prejudice against manufacturing industry, and will he join the Labour party in giving hope to thousands of unemployed people in the north-west by saying in future that manufacturing industry matters to the regions?

Mr. Lilley: I have recently made a number of visits to the north-west, where I visited businesses in Bolton, Bury, Clitheroe, Ellesmere Port, Liverpool, Manchester, Skelmersdale and Warrington. I was impressed by the progress that has been made in diversification and modernisation over the past decade. Most impressive of all was the Ellesmere Port Vauxhall works, which started exporting cars for the first time for 11 years last September and which now exports 40 per cent. of its output and takes on a new foreign market every fortnight.

Mr. Lee: The principal constituency employer of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), is the health service, but no less than 55 per cent. of employment in Pendle is in manufacturing. Although trading conditions are not easy at present, may I advise my right hon. Friend that the vast majority of manufacturing employers are keeping their nerve and fully support the Government's policy of steadily bringing down interest rates and inflation?

Mr. Lilley: I am glad to hear that from my hon. Friend. When I was in the region, I was impressed by the fact that the number of firms trading in the area has increased over the past decade by nearly one fifth, and that the number of manufacturing firms has increased by one quarter. That is very good, and shows a strength and ability to resist the downturn and to diversify away from traditional industries.

Post Office Services (Rural Areas)

9. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding the provision of Post Office services in rural areas.

Mr. Leigh: The Government remain committed to Post Office services which meet the social, industrial and commercial needs of the United Kingdom, including both urban and rural areas.

Mr. Wallace: I wonder whether the Minister realises that, if he were so minded, he could send a 1 kg package to Iceland or a 0·5 kg package to Tibet by international datapost more cheaply than he could send the equivalent packages by datapost to Orkney or Shetland. Does he accept that the revenue received by the Post Office as a result of the 75 per cent. surcharge on datapost to the Scottish islands is small compared with the adverse effect that it has on businesses in the islands? Just as the Government have accepted that social and political considerations outweigh commercial considerations in sustaining some forms of rural post office network, will they consider the case for taking into account similar social and political considerations with regard to datapost charges?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is right in one respect. We attach enormous importance to maintaining a uniform tariff structure for normal letter delivery to rural areas. However, the hon. Gentleman referred to datapost, which operates in a competitive and commercial market because it is above the 1 lb limit. First, it would not be right for me to comment on operational matters, which have always been the responsibility of the Post Office. Secondly, if through me the hon. Gentleman asked the Post Office to subsidise the service, he would ask it to do so at the expense of its competitors. I am not sure that that would be entirely right.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my hon. Friend assure the rural communities in North Yorkshire that the availability of a strong network of village post office counters will remain a key feature of the Government plans for the Post Office, as will universal delivery at a common price of the royal mail throughout the United Kingdom? The excellent service provided by rural village post offices is greatly valued by my constituents, and we ought to do what we can to keep it.

Mr. Leigh: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I live in a rural area myself and I find the service provided absolutely excellent. My post and, indeed, my red boxes are delivered on time.

Manufacturing (West Midlands)

11. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to assist manufacturing output in the west midlands.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman asks about the policies of the Department of Trade and Industry. They were recently set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the question of helping manufacturing industry. *[Interruption.]* I thought that we were on Question 11.

Mr. Speaker: Correct. Is the Minister not answering Question 11?

Mr. Redwood: I am answering Question 11.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the policies for supporting and helping manufacturing industry. The west midlands is a region which did extremely well in the 1980s, reaching record levels of output, investment and productivity. Our policies of promoting inward investment and assisting business and our budget for business will facilitate that progress in the 1990s.

Mr. Corbett: That confusing reply will send shivers down the spine of most manufacturers in Birmingham and the west midlands. Does not the Minister know or care that manufacturing investment is set to fall by 17 per cent. this year and that, since 1980, 370,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector in the west midlands have gone? Does he not realise that, in this second recession, the car industry in particular in the west midlands is being crippled? When will he start doing something to assist the manufacturing sector, on which we rely for our economic success?

Mr. Redwood: That was a confusing question. The hon. Gentleman does not seem to recognise the great achievements of the 1980s or the fact that investment

reached record levels by the end of that decade. The adjustment downwards in investment still leaves it well above the level of the 1970s, when the Labour party had a chance to do something for manufacturing industry but let it down so badly. All the Government's economic policies are geared to creating the conditions in which enterprise can flourish. Healthy industry depends on competitive markets, low taxation, the attraction of inward investment and the proposals set out by my right hon. Friend in his statement yesterday, which clearly showed all that the Government are doing through the DTI to assist manufacturing industry. The hon. Gentleman should look at the facts and see that many overseas countries and companies are now investing here, because they know that the climate is good for manufacturing investment.

Mr. Sayeed: When my hon. Friend has met manufacturers in the west midlands and elsewhere, has he found that they understand that, during the past decade under a Conservative Government, manufacturing investment and output increased by 20 per cent., manufacturing productivity by 60 per cent. and manufacturing profitability by 250 per cent?

Mr. Redwood: What my hon. Friend says about the success of the nation as a whole is right. If Opposition Members claim to speak for the west midlands, they should start to recognise how much success there was in that region in the 1980s, and how that success will continue in the 1990s if we stick to the right policies for manufacturing industry. The fact that so many firms are investing in the area—only the other day Brose announced a major investment in car-related supplies—shows that international investors know something that the Labour party does not know: that Britain is getting it right and will be a major manufacturing centre in the 1990s.

Manufacturers (Trade Balance)

12. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the trade balance in manufactured goods in *(a)* Germany and *(b)* Britain in 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury: The United Kingdom had a deficit of £13·7 billion. Germany had a surplus of £60·2 billion.

Mr. McAvoy: Will the Minister admit that these figures emphasise the true state of the British economy? Does he realise that our trade in manufactured goods shows a performance worse than that of any other industrialised country, with the exception of the United States, since 1979? In the face of declining investment, a fall in output, and major problems for British exporters, when will this "do nothing" Department of Trade and Industry do something?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am sorry to find the hon. Gentleman joining those of his colleagues who spend their time denigrating the performance of British manufacturing industry. Manufacturing output, manufacturing productivity and manufacturing investment last year were at record levels. Let us look at British manufacturing exports to Germany against British manufacturing imports from that country. Interestingly, the ratio, at 59 per cent., was higher last year than in any year between 1975 and 1979.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Is it not right that, in 1990, Britain's share of world trade in manufactures increased, for the second year running, after being more or less stable throughout the 1980s and having fallen catastrophically during the previous three decades? Is that not a remarkable sign of a real turnround in the performance and competitiveness of this country's industry?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the significance of the fact that our manufacturing exports reached a plateau—did not fall, but reached a plateau—in the 1980s after decades of decline. That is a tribute to the increase in productivity to which I have referred—an increase that is essential if our manufacturing industry is to continue to prosper in the 1990s.

Ms. Quin: Will the Minister now admit that the prospects for an improved trade balance are not helped by the fact that his proposed sell-off of the Export Credits Guarantee Department has turned out to be a complete fiasco? Can he tell us why there is no British bidder left for the ECGD? Will he confirm that the Government's lack of commitment to export credits for not-so-easy markets, and in the long term, has caused both bidders and exporters to react with alarm and dismay?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am sorry that the hon. Lady refuses to recognise that the Confederation of British Industry, among others, has welcomed the proposed privatisation of the insurance services group of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. I am sure that the CBI has given this welcome because it realises that a privatised insurance services group will be able to provide a better, more flexible and more responsive service to its customers—British industry.

Mr. Charles Wardle: If the United Kingdom's trade balance in manufactured goods is to compare favourably with Germany's, will it not be necessary, first, for this country to equal Germany's performance in respect of inflation and competitiveness? Is not that precisely what the Government's anti-inflationary policies are designed to achieve?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend has put his finger on an extremely important point. One of the major factors in the success of German industry since the war is the relatively stable inflationary environment in which it has operated. If we were to return to the policies that are always advocated by the Labour party, we should have again the inflation levels—more than 15 per cent., on average—that characterised that party's last period in government.

National Economic Development Council

13. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the director general of the National Economic Development Council to discuss the future of British Industry.

Mr. Lilley: My Department has frequent contacts with National Economic Development Organisation officials on a wide range of business matters. I will be chairing the council meeting on 20 May 1991, and I also expect to meet the director general a few days before then.

Mr. Dunnachie: Is the Minister aware that, in the last six months, 100,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost as

a result of the policies pursued by his Government, and that since 1979 about 2·2 million manufacturing jobs have been lost, again as a result of the policies of his Government? Has he read a recent press report that indicates the depths of the recession that this country is in? When will the Government take the action that is urgently necessary to bring Britain in from the cold, away from recession, and back to a level economy?

Mr. Lilley: Manufacturing output fell under the Labour Government, and it has increased under this Administration. Manufacturing exports are 60 per cent. up in volume terms and our share of world trade has been maintained over the past 10 years, a period in which France, Germany, the United States and Japan have all lost some share of world trade to the newly industrialised countries of the far east.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, last year, manufacturing investment and exports reached an all-time record high, and that a survey undertaken by the West Midlands chamber of commerce showed that no fewer than seven out of 10 firms intend either to maintain or increase investment in training next year? Will he reiterate that it is part of the hypocrisy of the Labour party's attitude towards manufacturing industry that, when it was last in power, manufacturing output fell and profitability sank to an all-time 20-year low?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The latest CBI survey shows the welcome fact that industry expects to maintain spending on research and innovation and to increase spending on training during the recession. These are things that never happened under the Labour Government.

Economy

14. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response he will make when he next meets the CBI to its recent report on the state of the economy.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Douglas.

Mr. Douglas: No. 14, and in Scotland we measure people from the neck up.

Mr. Lilley: I welcome the CBI's business agenda for the 1990s, "Competing in the New Europe". The CBI is right to set winning the battle against inflation at the top of its agenda.

Mr. Douglas: The Minister will be aware that the CBI is extremely concerned about the fall in the level of investment. That being so, why are the Government allowing the European Commissioner, Bruce Millan, to withhold £100 million which is due to coalfield areas, including my constituency, which have been deprived of funds? How does the Secretary of State hope to change the Commissioner's mind and ensure that the £10 million that is due to the east of Scotland goes to that area, that the matter is settled and that there is a satisfactory interface between the Department and the Treasury? When will he ensure that the coalfield areas get their dues?

Mr. Lilley: I had a useful meeting recently with Commissioner Millan to discuss this issue. Many misunderstandings were clarified. I hope that, before long, the money will be released. I am glad to have the powerful support of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the CBI the new uncertainty that is facing industry as a result of United Kingdom laws being suspended or amended because of appeals that these laws conflict with Euro-laws on everything from lotteries to Sunday trading? As the guardian of industry and commerce, will my right hon. Friend take steps today to advise shopkeepers and the owners of supermarkets on whether they are entitled in the Government's views to open their premises on Sundays? Will he take steps also to advise local authorities whether it is the Government's view that they have powers to implement the Sunday trading legislation that has been approved by Parliament?

Mr. Lilley: I understand that yesterday's decision related only to whether local authorities should give undertakings to the court when seeking injunctions to prohibit Sunday trading. If that is right, the decision would not appear to cast doubt upon Mr. Justice Hoffmann's decision last year that the Shops Act 1950 was not incompatible with the treaty of Rome. The decision represents no change in the underlying law.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: When the Secretary of State next meets the CBI will he tell its representatives that they are right to be gloomy about the state of the economy, given that all the factors that produced the Lawson revival in the 1980s—from the credit bubble to the effect of oil on the balance of payments and the devaluation of 1986—were one-offs that cannot recur? Will he tell them also that the future of the economy under this Government is permafrost unless we get a competitive exchange rate and low interest rates? The Government cannot expand the economy without regenerating inflation and widening the balance of payments gap. That will be the position until we have a change of Government.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman's views are certainly not those of the CBI. I advise him and other Opposition Members to read the CBI's "Business Agenda for the 1990s", which says:

"It will certainly be important that the United Kingdom does not retrace the steps that have been taken to advantage over the past decade."

One of the aims of the CBI has been

"to remind the 25 per cent. of the Electorate at the next General Election who were under 18 in 1974 how much has been achieved in the last decade. For it is all too easy to forget what the situation was like in the late 1970s, industrial disputes, apparently regarded as inevitable".

The CBI does not want to return to that, but the Labour party's new proposals commit us to doing so.

Sir Robert McCrindle: Following his welcome attempt yesterday to redefine the role of his Department, will the Secretary of State say in more detail what he meant by "encouragement to innovation"? In so far as that might have to follow the increase in Government-sponsored research and development, will he tell the House whether the appropriate funds are available for that purpose?

Mr. Lilley: Commercial research and development undertaken by companies is best encouraged by a competitive environment. We shall encourage that. However, research and investment at a pure, pre-competitive level need and receive Government support.

We spend some £3 billion on civil research and development. That is more than the Japanese Government spend proportionately for the size of our economy. We are introducing encouragements for industry to exploit the potential that that gives, to encourage small and medium firms to get more involved in research and development, particularly with the science base in universities, and to change the climate in the City and industry to encourage innovation.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the central question and face the consequences of the recession in terms of lost jobs and lost capacity, when 10,000 jobs are going every week and 2,500 companies are going bankrupt every month? Does he agree with the central finding of the CBI survey that was issued yesterday? Unless something is done, 50 per cent. of companies expect to cut investment in the next four months and 45 per cent. of companies—nearly one half—expect to lay off workers. How many more months of redundancies and closures will it take before the "do nothing" Department of Trade and Industry begins to act, or has the Conservative party become, as it was in the 1920s and 1930s, the party of recession and unemployment?

Mr. Lilley: The key finding in the CBI's report was that the balance of companies expecting further decline was down sharply, from 51 to 17 per cent. As for investment spending, the key fact is that industry is maintaining spending on innovation and new products and processes and increasing it on training. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that. My speech looked forward to the future in the 1990s, building on the success of the 1980s. The hon. Gentleman wants to take us back to the 1960s and 1970s. The trouble is that Opposition Front-Bench Members all belong to the "Let's turn back" group.

Single European Market

15. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress on the creation of the single European market.

Mr. Sainsbury: Good progress has been made towards the creation of the single market. Of the 282 measures set out in the 1985 Commission White Paper, "Completing the Internal Market", 197 measures have now been agreed by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Viggers: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Conservative party, which originally took this country into the European Economic Community, to its great benefit, and despite the sullen and unhelpful attitude of the Labour party of the time—and some peripheral sniping—is now on target to complete requisite legislation for the single European market by December 1992?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to do so. The Government have consistently been in the lead in implementing directives in domestic law. Occasionally—perhaps even at this moment—the Danes have been slightly ahead of us, but we have an excellent record and are well on target to creating the single market, which will be of great benefit to British industry.

Trade Indemnity

17. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of Trade Indemnity to discuss the number of business bankruptcies.

Mr. Sainsbury: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend has any plans to hold such a meeting.

Mr. Ross: Has the Minister read the recent Trade Indemnity report, which showed that business failures rose by 90 per cent. in the third quarter of 1990 and predicted that those figures will remain the same through much of next year? Is he aware that 24,442 firms failed in 1990? How does he propose to deal with that catastrophic failure in businesses?

Mr. Sainsbury: I draw the hon. Member's attention to the fact that the figures from Trade Indemnity are not comprehensive, as they relate only to the businesses where Trade Indemnity has a liability. I also draw his attention to the fact that, although insolvencies are always a matter of regret, the percentage of the total stock of businesses that encountered insolvency in 1990 was in no way out of line with the experience of the 1980s. A dynamic economy will always feature a high turnover of firms.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if there has been a record number of new company start-ups over a long time, there is bound, in a recession, to be a record number of bankruptcies? What matters is that British industry is able to compete effectively in the increasingly competitive environment that will exist in Europe post-1992 and to sell its goods on quality, not just on price.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is entirely right. In 1990 there were one third more businesses and, therefore, in a dynamic economy, there will inevitably be more bankruptcies. What is necessary for success is a high degree of productivity and innovation. That is what the Government's policies are encouraging.

Imports

18. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to reduce import penetration.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department's policies aim to foster the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. McKelvey: All to our loss in Kilmarnock. Is the Minister not aware that, since 1979, there has been a massive one third increase in import penetration? The import penetration on office equipment and processing data is colossal at 95 per cent. The import penetration on machine tools is huge at 52 per cent. and that for clothing, textiles and footware is 40 per cent. The Minister must tell me what to tell my constituents of Kilmarnock. How can they have some hope for the future when their economy is based on industry?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad to note that the latest figures show export volume up 3 per cent. and import volume down 2 per cent. on the equivalent quarter last year.

War Crimes Bill

3.32 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have received numerous inquiries about the future of the War Crimes Bill and it might be helpful if I reminded the House of the provisions of the Parliament Acts.

The rejection of the War Crimes Bill for a second time by another place brings into play the provisions of the Act. The House of Lords will be asked to return the Bill to this House where it will be prepared for Royal Assent. No further proceedings are required in this House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Further to your statement, Mr. Speaker, the whole House will be grateful to you for clarifying the position under the Parliament Acts. In particular, your statement has made it clear that the procedures now being followed come into play automatically following the defeat of the Bill last night in another place.

The Parliament Act 1911 makes it clear that only if the House were to direct to the contrary would the Bill not be submitted for Royal Assent. It will be for the convenience of the House if I make clear now on behalf of the Government that we see no need for time to be made available for the House to consider this matter yet again. The House has repeatedly made clear its support for the War Crimes Bill, on free votes, and by very large majorities. The most recent occasion was on the Second Reading of the Bill this Session on Monday 18 March. There is, therefore, no case for putting the matter to the House again.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): When we debated the possibilities of following this procedure in the Chamber a few weeks ago I made it clear, on behalf of the Opposition, that we thought that the most important principle at stake was the supremacy of the elected Chamber of the House of Commons. My party has consistently supported that principle since the Parliament Acts were introduced and we have no hesitation in saying today—I do so on behalf of the shadow Cabinet and my hon. Friends—that we think it is proper now for that procedure to be followed without further delay.

Although I personally did not support the War Crimes Bill, the reality is that this House, by substantial majorities on two occasions, passed it. It cannot be acceptable for a non-elected, unrepresentative Upper House to frustrate the will of the elected House of Commons. That would be totally unacceptable to us. I make that absolutely clear in supporting the decision that you, Mr. Speaker, have taken. You have the support, as does the view expressed by the Leader of the House, of Her Majesty's Opposition.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I take it that hon. Members wish to raise different matters. The War Crimes Bill is not a matter for me.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, it may be worth drawing the attention of the House, before Mr. Speaker signs the certificate which would be the next stage in this procedure, to the fact that 80 years ago, in the preamble to the Parliament Bill as it then was, it was said that it would be expedient to do this because it was intended to switch the basis of the House of Lords from a hereditary to a popular basis. As it has taken 80 years to do that, would it not be sensible to have not quite so long a delay before a certificate is used—for the first time in 50 years—and what would be lost by allowing the House a second opportunity to decide whether or not that certificate should be used?

Mr. Speaker: These are matters for the Government. They have made their position quite clear in what the Leader of the House has said.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is not in fact a matter for the Government; it is a matter for you. Therefore, in the interests of the whole House, an opportunity ought to be given to this House to pause and consider whether we really want to implement this legislation and the mechanism which has been installed, which was intended for issues of great constitutional importance—not for the narrow and rather unworthy purpose of facilitating the prosecution of a few old men——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That may be, but the position is quite clear. I am bound by the Act. I have no discretion in this matter, unless the House directs otherwise.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Was there not a 12-month interval between the times that we debated this Bill? Is it not a fact that on those two occasions and before—on the principle of the Bill—there were substantial majorities in favour of proceeding? What would be the purpose if the views of the elected Chamber did not prevail and if the views of the unelected Chamber did prevail on this point? It is not just the merits of the case——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Matters of this nature are relevant to a debate. They are not relevant to points of order. I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly not a lawyer and I know very little about the law. However, I pay great attention when lawyers of great distinction in the other place——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may well take account of that, but it is not a matter for me on a point of order. The Government have made their position clear.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Your statement reasserts the supremacy of this place over a wholly unelected Chamber. Can there be any delay in the necessary documentation coming from another place to this House?

Mr. Speaker: My understanding is that we send a message to the other House asking for the Bill to come back.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A few moments ago you said that you were powerless to act—I think that I quote you accurately—"unless the House directs otherwise." Would you please advise us as to what procedures are open to us to enable the House to act otherwise? May I, through you, remind

my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that many of us on these Benches are thoroughly ashamed that a Conservative Government are doing what they are doing.

Mr. Speaker: I can give the hon. Gentleman the answer to his question. Yes; certainly if the Government were to table a motion and to find time for it, that would be an opportunity for the House to give its decision. If the hon. Gentleman were to table a motion and the Government were to find time for it, that would also be an opportunity for the House to decide.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have made a statement about what the House could do in the circumstances that prevail today. As we all know, there is a possibility that the House of Lords will reject what you have said and that it will take further action. I think that it is high time that the House and you, Mr. Speaker, considered that the next step should be to abolish the House of Lords. There is a general election in the offing. What is the point of having a general election for 650 Members of Parliament if the people down the road, 1,100 of them who are there for life, with not one elected by anybody outside the place, can tell the elected House of Commons what to do? Let us get rid of them.

Mr. Speaker: That is a point of view.

Mr. MacGregor: You have made it clear, Mr. Speaker, that the procedures under the Parliament Acts are automatic. The Government, both through myself and the Home Secretary, made it clear in the procedure debate and on the Second Reading of the War Crimes Bill in March of this year that, if a dispute remained between the two Houses, we would expect, as the Parliament Acts do, to ensure that the views of the elected Chamber ultimately prevailed over those of the other House.

The position is straightforward. That is the stage that we have reached under the Parliament Acts and you, Mr. Speaker, have made clear the action that you must take. As for the Government, it is clear that the House expressed its view on a number of occasions by very large majorities, on a free vote. It would be wrong for the Government to intervene now to frustrate the wishes of this House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that we can pursue the matter any further.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 17 MAY

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Archy Kirkwood
Mr. Graham Riddick
Mr. Doug Hoyle

National Enterprise (Reconstruction) Board

3.42 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a National Enterprise (Reconstruction) Board to identify and evaluate possibilities for commercial investment by Her Majesty's Government.

Contrary to some assertions that I have heard in the House, the Bill is a serious measure. It has caused a certain amount of consternation among some of my hon. Friends, but I can assure them that that is as nothing compared to the shock which preparing the Bill had had on me. However, it is an important measure with which we need to persevere if we are to avoid the errors of the past. I well remember those distant, dark days of the 1970s when my late hon. Friend, the former illustrious Member for Eastbourne, regularly introduced Bills seeking to denationalise one industry after another. It was an hors d'oeuvre, offering the public a taste of the menu that they would enjoy after the 1979 general election. Greatly to the credit of Mr. Ian Gow, many of those industries have transferred from ownership by politicians to ownership by the public.

Curiously, the Labour party does not appear to share the same confidence in its own proposals as Mr. Gow placed in his. That lack of confidence seems to be the reason why the Labour party is coy about presenting such legislative proposals in the House, preferring press conferences to Parliament. Therefore, I thought that in the new spirit of cross-party pairing, it might be helpful if I introduced the Bill to spare the Opposition from repeating the mistakes that they made in the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s.

In its policy document, the Labour party spoke of

"an effective partnership between industry and Government"

which, we are told, exists in those nice countries — Germany, Italy and Japan. The good news is that out goes the command economy which brought us the National Enterprise Board and in comes the spanking new turbo-charged national technology organisation to be called British Technology Enterprise. My hon. Friends may mistakenly believe that enterprise has the same relevance to British technology as democratic has to the German Democratic Republic.

Although no one has yet mentioned it at my surgery, we are told by the Labour party that the public interest requires such an organisation which would

"take a longer term view to develop British innovations . . . and to invest in the high technologies of the future."

There would also be a national investment bank—an NIB—which would provide long-term funding to small and medium-sized companies and help

"to mobilise private capital for publicity led projects in the country's infrastructure".

The NIB would

"be run on strictly commercial lines and operate at arm's length from Government".

There are some potential pitfalls which my Bill would help to avoid. First, the strategy would require planning. Politicians are not good at that as we know from the problem that George Brown faced when he introduced his great national plan in 1964. It ran out of print within two hours of publication.

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

Secondly, in the business of investing in the high technologies of the future, we would have to avoid being hoodwinked by American entrepreneurs making cars with gull-wing doors, which I think gave rise to the expression to be gulled or taken for a ride. Although it produced only 500 cars, the De Lorean motor company managed to siphon off £77 million of our money. It is true that at £150,000 a copy, it was a record breaker. It was the fastest motor car from the production line to the motor museum.

As I said a moment ago, the NIB would be run on strictly commercial lines. There is a risk that that commitment could be confused with the statement in 1977 that "the NEB"—that is the National Enterprise Board and should not be confused with the NIB—

"must base its investment policy on sound commercial criteria."

Unfortunately, De Lorean was but one of a number of sound commercial investments. In addition to Rolls-Royce and British Leyland, by 1979 there were 67 Government shareholdings in companies costing £155 million. Another was British Underwater Engineering, which proved to be an aquatic leap in the dark. As my hon. Friends the Members for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) and for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who is now the much-respected Minister for Corporate Affairs, reported in an excellent pamphlet, in 1978 the consequence of applying those sound commercial criteria was that the NEB made a loss of £40 million after extraordinary items. Presumably the extraordinary items were the ones that made money.

By the time the unfortunate episode was concluded NEXOS office systems had been sold at a loss of £34 million in 1982 and in 1984 INMOS had been sold for £95 million but its new owners reported losses aggregating £62 million between 1984 and 1988. Of course, British Leyland had been the beneficiary of an investment of £2,500 million.

I had originally thought of another title for my Bill. It came to me as I was attending a meeting with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs. I noticed on the wall of his office a painting of a horse race meeting—obviously it was a relic of the days when the NEB was in charge of the DTI. It seemed to me that a better title for my Bill might be the Industrial Totalisator Board Bill. After all, if one puts one's money blind on the tote at least there is a chance of backing a dead cert, but if one put one's money in the NEB it would have been a certain dud.

The De Lorean experience contains a number of lessons we might usefully learn. As the Public Accounts Committee established, the business ability of the Government team was woefully lacking and the nominee directors appointed by the Government were shown to be completely ineffectual, offering little or no protection to public funds.

In the Bill, we would have to consider the competence of those responsible for the policy of picking industrial winners. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) may be one of the best qualified as he is a consultant to the National Association of Bookmakers. Regrettably, the Opposition Front Bench industry team seems to have ruled itself out because of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry described as its industrial virginity,

"unsullied by any experience of industrial management."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 621.]

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) has shadow responsibility for the brewing industry, but one wonders whether he is qualified to organise a drinks party in a brewery.

In all seriousness, if the new commercial Labour party's policy of picking industrial winners is to succeed, it is important that social engineering is left out. There are some alarming examples which illustrate some of the thinking within the Labour party. I use the word "thinking" loosely. For example, Walsall metropolitan borough council has an economic development strategy designed to

"improve the economic welfare of borough residents, particularly those who are disadvantaged for reasons of gender, race, disability or other form of economic, or social, circumstance."

The trouble with the Labour party is that, whenever it gets hold of public money, it cannot resist some positive discrimination—what is known in public bars as the one-legged black lesbian syndrome.

We should not be deterred by the dramatic contrast between the performance of industry when it was in the hands of politicians and needed Government subsidies of £19 million and today when those same companies have been net contributors of £1,500 million in corporation tax to the Treasury. Nor should we be put off by the fact that many countries have beaten a path to Britain's door for advice on privatisation. I am sure that most of the 11 million shareholders would readily hand over their shares in exchange for Labour party junk bonds.

The House will agree that the best way to enable us—and the public—to examine Labour's so-called industrial strategy would be to give me leave to introduce the Bill. In Committee, we might even establish the hidden agenda behind Labour Members' support for London zoo. They hope that it will be a safe haven for their industrial lame ducks and white elephants.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Gerald Howarth, Sir Marcus Fox, Mr. Nicholas Soames, Mr. John Carlisle, Mrs. Edwina Currie, Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark, Mr. Robert Hayward, Mr. Jack Aspinwall, Mr. John Watts, Mr. Roger King, Mr. Terry Dicks and Mr. Michael Brown.

NATIONAL ENTERPRISE (RECONSTRUCTION) BOARD

Mr. Gerald Howarth accordingly presented a Bill to establish a National Enterprise (Reconstruction) Board to identify and evaluate possibilities for commercial investment by Her Majesty's Government: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 10 May and to be printed. [Bill 152.]

Broadcasting

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott).

3.52 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That this House agrees with the Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c., in its First Report (House of Commons Paper No. 11).

The purpose of this debate is not to confirm the principle of permanent televising of our proceedings—that issue was settled by the House last July—but to consider, and I hope approve, the recommendations put forward in the report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting as to how parliamentary broadcasting should be organised and financed on a long-term basis.

The House will be aware that the arrangements originally put in place for the experiment have been extended for a transitional period lasting until 31 July this year. It is necessary to move ahead now, if Parliament approves, so that the appropriate arrangements can be in place by that deadline date.

The report that we are considering builds on and takes forward the work of the Committee under my two predecessors, my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham) and, latterly, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), to whom I wish to pay tribute this afternoon. As a comparatively new member of the Committee, I should like to congratulate and thank all the previous and serving members of the Committee. Much constructive work has been done and much thought given to bring us to this point.

I should also like to echo a theme that is dear to the heart of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East—the close collaboration and co-operation between the House and broadcasters, without which neither the successful conduct of the experiment nor the agreed package of proposals for the future would have been possible.

It might assist the House if I gave the criteria by which we were guided in reaching our conclusions. They were: the overriding importance of proper parliamentary control; the desirability of ensuring an efficient, cost-effective and well-managed televising operation; and the need for a fair distribution of costs.

The House quite rightly attaches much importance to the issue of parliamentary control. Let me reassure the House that firm parliamentary control over the broadcasting of our proceedings will remain. The Select Committee on Broadcasting will continue, but after some years its functions may be absorbed into the new "domestic" Committee structure recommended in the recent report to the House of Commons Commission by Sir Robin Ibbs. That will not alter its objectives, its powers or its effectiveness. The Select Committee will provide, as it does now, a vehicle for the general parliamentary oversight of the televising operation, a channel for any representations from Members or broadcasters, and a forum for the taking of any Executive decisions which may be needed.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My right hon. Friend is right to say that accountability for televising the House and its Committees remains firmly under the control of the House. However, does he take into account the fact that, when the television authorities wish to televise a particular Committee, it deprives other Committees of the use of the larger Rooms? To that extent, the affairs of the House are inconvenienced, and that should be considered in the review.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the House agrees that the televising of Select Committees and Standing Committees is important. A wider audience should be able to see the important work of the House. That will sometimes create the practical difficulties that my hon. Friend described. The arrangements that we are trying to put in place for the televising of Committee proceedings will, I hope, ease some of the practical problems that have been experienced.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman so early in his speech, but my point is relevant to that made by the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler). I voted consistently for the House to be televised. I support the televising of Standing Committees and Select Committees. However, I do not understand why—the right hon. Gentleman may not want to comment on this now, but he could write to me if necessary—this morning I was not allowed to take a photograph in a Committee Room, where only I and another person were present. However, as I walked down the Committee Corridor I saw two television cameras in another Committee Room. It is a ridiculous anomaly that television cameras can operate with a host of people, officials and hon. Members present, but neither I nor a professional photographer nor anyone else can take a photograph in a Committee Room.

I hope that the Leader of the House will consider that silly anomaly. It seems crazy to people outside that photographs cannot be taken when probably billions of people watch pictures produced by the television cameras day in, day out.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman's point could be considered again through the appropriate channels, but I am sure that he will agree that it is not a matter for the Select Committee on Broadcasting. I take note of what he said; it can perhaps be reconsidered by the appropriate means.

Perhaps I can finish the point about parliamentary control. The Supervisor of Broadcasting, who is directly answerable to the Select Committee, will also carry on with his important co-ordinating and managerial responsibilities which, under the permanent arrangements, will also encompass the other place. The most significant task for the supervisor is, of course, to ensure proper parliamentary control over the form of the signals through the operator's compliance with the rules of coverage. I know that many right hon. and hon. Members have found the services provided by the supervisor reassuring, and I am sure that the House will join me in complimenting him and his office on their work on parliamentary control.

Lastly, Parliament's interests will be fully protected by the presence on the board of the proposed new company to be established with the broadcasters of an equal number of directors representing each House, and a chairman

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appointed by you, Mr. Speaker. I shall have more to say about that subject later in my speech, as it is an important aspect of parliamentary control.

I shall now deal with the case for an integrated operation. Our first decision, reached unanimously, was that an integrated operation incorporating coverage of the Chambers and Committees of both Houses under a single management would offer significant economies of scale. Fortunately, the Select Committee on Broadcasting in another place took the same view, so we were able to proceed to consider the other aspects of the permanent arrangements on a jointly agreed basis; so there was absolute agreement not only in this House, but in another place.

The Committee next considered the important question of who should produce the pictures. We examined carefully the arguments in favour of establishing for this purpose a broadcasting unit as a Department of the House. Members who favour that option will no doubt wish to advance the arguments that they put in the Committee, which are covered in paragraphs 12 to 22 of the report. A majority of the Committee—a narrow one, but a majority nonetheless—took a different view, and one that I firmly share.

Let me briefly give the reasons. First, we believe that the parliamentary control that is needed can be provided through the existing machinery—which I have just described—involving the Select Committee and the Supervisor of Broadcasting, a system which everyone agrees has worked very successfully so far. The parliamentary control aspect of this issue is not in question under either arrangement—that favoured by the majority of the Committee or the alternative arrangement.

The main arguments against an "in-House" unit are those of cost and efficiency. The record of the independent operator who has been responsible for producing the pictures so far clearly shows—I quote our report—

"the management of a fixed price contracted out operation would be leaner and more cost-effective than could be obtained by establishing a Department of the House, especially given the lack of experience within the House of running a complex broadcasting operation of this sort."

Moreover, the irregular pattern of the House's sittings and the recesses of differing lengths place a high premium on the redeployment of broadcasting staff to other tasks when the House is not meeting. The report argues:

"It is doubtful whether a Department of the House, operating under public service employment practice, would be in a position to exploit as flexibly these opportunities for maximising the productive utilisation of staff."

Those powerful arguments, based on the lessons of more than 18 months of televising, persuaded the Committee to move away from its earlier support in principle for an in-House unit and to recommend instead that the operator should be an independent company chosen by public tender. Experience has shown that it works well, that it is the most cost-effective method and that it is more appropriate in terms of operating efficiency for a service such as we are considering.

I believe that the approach recommended by the Select Committee is infinitely preferable to one that would involve the employment by the House itself of all the broadcasting staff, with all the bureaucratic and establishment complications that would inevitably arise as a result of the House's lack of familiarity with this type of technically complex undertaking.

The third element in the permanent televising arrangements is the distribution of costs. So far, those have been shared between the broadcasters, who have paid for the equipment and running costs, the Parliamentary Works Office, which has been responsible for changes to the fabric of the building, and the House itself, which has funded the staffing of the Select Committee and the office of the Supervisor of Broadcasting.

In our report, we quoted figures which show that the burden of the expenditure during the experiment fell roughly equally on the broadcasters on the one hand and on the public purse on the other. With regard to recurrent costs, that broad pattern is expected to continue—if anything, with the broadcasters shouldering a somewhat larger load. However, the overall balance will be skewed during the current financial year and the next by the need for significant capital expenditure notably on the fitting out of Committee Rooms for coverage by remotely operated cameras, a new lighting system in the Chamber, modernisation of the sound system and a new control room, about which I will say more later.

Those costs will be met—reasonably enough, as they involve alterations to the Palace of Westminster—from public funds. Details of the projected costs of parliamentary broadcasting over the next two to three years are contained in appendix 9 published with the Select Committee's report.

I have referred to the expenditure side of the balance sheet and perhaps I can very briefly mention the income side. Receipts from sales of the signal accrue, both under the current system and the proposed permanent arrangements, to those broadcasting organisations that are members of the House of Commons Broadcasting Unit Ltd.—shortly to become the Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Ltd., or PARBUL—if the House approves the Committee's report.

The most recent accounts of HOCBUL indicate that receipts from the sale of the signal between July 1989 and September 1990 came to some £288,000. Those moneys go, under the arrangements previously agreed by the House, towards defraying the cost of producing the signal. That will continue to be the case under the permanent arrangements, although the Select Committee will keep a careful watch over the size of the receipts to ensure that the interests of the House are properly protected.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): As financial probity is one of the things to which the right hon. Gentleman keeps referring, will he confirm that under his proposals no receipts from the signal will come back to the House?

Mr. MacGregor: That is the position that exists at the moment and that is what is proposed for the new arrangements. If we consider the costs in detail, it is clear that the broadcasters will be meeting more costs—indirect costs—further down the line, amounting to several millions of pounds, in the arrangements for the future televising. Indeed, they meet such costs now. The report does not purely show direct costs. As it makes clear, the broadcasters will have to meet significant further sums. In view of that, it has been agreed that those sums will come back to the broadcasting organisations.

However, I have just said that the Select Committee will be able to keep a careful watch over the size of the receipts. Clearly, if they grow substantially—growth would have to be very substantial—it will be possible to consider the arrangements again. That would be a matter for the Select Committee. The present arrangements are right for the period ahead.

To sum up, our recommendations regarding the arrangements for permanent televising are as follows: that televising should be conducted and managed as a single integrated operation, incorporating coverage of the Chambers of both Houses and their Committees; that responsibility for producing the signals should be assigned to an outside operator, chosen by public tender; that the costs associated with producing the signals should continue to be shared between the broadcasters and the taxpayer according to broadly the same criteria as have applied to the experiment and the current transitional session.

We make no apology for the fact that, except for coverage of the other place, those are, in essence, the same arrangements as exist now. If I may quote our report:

"None of the evidence we have received suggests that there would be anything to be gained by abandoning them for the sake of some other untried formula."

The details of the permanent arrangements are set out in the report and I will not therefore repeat them in full. Suffice to say that a new company will be formed to succeed House of Commons Broadcasting Unit Ltd., which, in recognition of its wider responsibilities in relation to both Houses, will be known as Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Ltd., or PARBUL for short. The structure of PARBUL will closely follow that of HOCBUL, with the costs of the equipment and of the operator's contract being allocated on the basis of shareholdings taken by the participating broadcasting organisations, and with revenues from the sale of the signals distributed according to the same formula. The broadcasters will appoint seven directors to the board, as will Parliament—three from this House, three from another place, plus the Supervisor of Broadcasting ex officio. The Chairman will be appointed by you, Mr. Speaker.

As for the type of coverage, no changes are proposed in the Chamber of the Commons. Committee coverage will continue to be demand-led. The cost of televising every Committee meeting in public would be prohibitive. There will, however, be an important development in the technical arrangements for Committee coverage. From the autumn, it is hoped, subject to successful technical trials, that one unit of three remotely operated cameras will be in service, with the possibility of a second at a later stage. This improvement in the physical arrangements for Committee coverage will, I am sure, be welcomed by Committee Chairmen, Members and staff.

Finally, I should mention the modifications to the sound system here in the Chamber—which have already begun and which will be completed in two stages during the summer recesses of 1991 and 1992—and the installation of a new permanent lighting system. Prototypes of that will be demonstrated under operational conditions in the Chamber between 7 and 17 May for right hon. and hon. Members to view and comment upon subsequently if they wish. I have given more details of the lighting demonstration in answer to a written question this afternoon. It would, I think, be fair to say that all the members of the Committee were very impressed by the prototype, but we shall await the reactions of more hon. Members before decisions are reached.

I now turn to a matter on which we were not able to secure a final decision before agreeing our report. As I said earlier, in the context of future capital expenditure on televising, a crucial feature of the permanent arrangements is the need for a new central control room from which the entire integrated operation will be managed. The existing control room in the Commonwealth Press Writing Room is simply not large enough for that purpose, and is in any case becoming increasingly unsuitable even for its present more limited role. The Select Committee has therefore asked the Parliamentary Works Office to carry out a series of feasibility studies and examinations of various possible sites for a new integrated control room.

After considerable analysis and discussion, the realistic options have now been reduced to three: inside the House, the cylindrical void in the tower above the Central Lobby dome; and outside the House, Nos. 4 and 7 Millbank. The former is a privately owned building, part of which the BBC has recently occupied as the base for its parliamentary operations, while the latter is under consideration by the PWO for renting as part of the scheme to rehouse staff who will be displaced from St. Stephen's house when it is demolished as a result of the Jubilee line extension. The case for and against each of the three options is set out in detail in the Committee's report, so there is no need for me to rehearse the arguments now.

On balance, the Broadcasting Committee takes the view that the Central Lobby tower represents an imaginative and structurally feasible solution, which, in the absence of any other suitable accommodation inside the House, ought to be pursued. Let me quote the reasoning set out in our report:

"this proposal represents our preferred way of maintaining the broadcasting unit both psychologically and physically as an integral part of the service of the House. It cannot be emphasised too strongly"

—this important point is sometimes misunderstood—

"that the control room is the House's own facility and that its occupants, although not employed directly by the House, feel a loyalty to it rather than to what is usually described as 'the broadcasters'. Thus, a location within the building, although not absolutely essential, is strongly to be preferred on grounds of operational reliability, staff morale and administrative efficiency."

Naturally, cost has been an important factor in our consideration of the alternatives. Meaningful comparisons are complicated by the fact that, while the Central Lobby tower option would involve a rather larger initial capital outlay than either of the two Millbank sites, they in turn would entail substantial annual rental and other charges, in addition to the costs of refurbishment.

In the Committee's judgment, the £2 million estimated cost of the Central Lobby tower option should be viewed as a long-term investment in the permanent televising of the House's proceedings, and can be justified on that basis.

The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee, fulfilling its duty under Standing Order No. 125 to

"advise Mr. Speaker on the control of the accommodation and services in that part of the Palace . . . occupied by or on behalf of the House of Commons",

has considered the possibility of siting the control room in the Central Lobby Tower and, at its meeting on 4 March 1991, rejected the idea for practical, financial and other

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reasons set out in a letter to me from its Chairman, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), which is published as appendix 11 with our report.

This difference between the two Committees, each rightly looking at the issue from its own point of view, has still to be resolved. I have already mentioned the question of cost. This is one of the factors which still has to be properly evaluated, since the estimates have been fluctuating as both Committees have been meeting. We hope to have a new paper before us shortly on the costings of the different options.

As this matter has yet to be considered by the full Services Committee, which I also chair, it would not be appropriate for me to say any more at this stage, except that an urgent resolution of the problem is essential if the new control room is to be operational by the summer of 1992. The House is not asked to take a view on this today.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be unfortunate for the House if the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee were to take an entrenched position on this matter? Although we all respect that Committee's work, we very much hope that it will listen to the considerable work and thought that has been put into the recommendation that my right hon. Friend has advanced. The Committee would arouse great respect in the House if it felt flexible enough to change its position to accommodate those recommendations.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that a great deal of thought and work has already gone into the proposition, as those of us on the Broadcasting Committee know well. As my hon. Friend knows, I have gone along with the view of the Broadcasting Committee on this matter, although, as I have said, the matter will also come before the Services Committee, which I also chair. So far, I have taken the view that my hon. Friend has outlined. I am sure that the members of the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee who, perhaps understandably, are not here in force, unlike the members of the Broadcasting Committee, will take note of what my hon. Friend has said.

The House will expect me to say a few words about the parliamentary archives. The Select Committee did not examine in detail, as part of its consideration of the permanent arrangements, the future organisation, staffing, and funding of the archive, since a working party had already been established by the Clerks of the two Houses with precisely that remit. The Committee confined itself, therefore, to reaffirming the principle that the archive should continue to maintain complete tapes of all proceedings in the Chamber, as well as of any Committee proceedings covered by the broadcasters. But we also thought it right to draw attention to the anomaly which has arisen with regard to the archive, whereby its staff are employed by the other place, even though the vast majority of its work stems from the proceedings of this House.

To complicate matters further, the archive's accommodation is provided by the Commons, while its capital equipment needs have been met until recently by the Parliamentary Works Office, although this expenditure has now been switched, with effect from the current Session, to the vote for House of Commons (Administration). The Committee expressed the hope that these issues would be addressed by the working party, which I understand has now submitted its report to the Clerks of the two Houses. The question of receipts from sales of archive material was not part of the working party's remit, but is being addressed separately by the Supervisor of Broadcasting. However, I believe that the receipts of sales from archives material is very small at present.

One other aspect of the archive which I ought to mention is the question of the uses to which archive material should be put—that is, other than for broadcasting purposes, to which specific guidelines already apply. The Committee has devoted considerable time and effort to the task of drawing up a set of guidelines for the non-broadcasting uses of archive material, which will prevent obvious abuses without being unduly restrictive in their effect. We believe that the guidelines contained in paragraphs 99 and 100 of the report should prove workable, although, of course, we will keep them under review.

There is, however, one aspect of the possible usage of archive material which we were not able to tackle as part of our report, and that is the area of party political or electoral campaigning. The Committee considered this matter at its meeting yesterday and decided that no further guidelines were needed for this purpose for the time being, but that the matter should be kept under review.

An issue which in previous debates many hon. Members considered to be important was the prospects for establishing a dedicated parliamentary television channel. The obstacles to the achievement of that objective have never been technical: they are financial. In the absence of public money—we are talking about an annual cost of several million pounds—any decision to initiate a dedicated channel has been dependent on the commercial judgments of those with a potential interest in such a project.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: It might be better if I made progress on this issue. Then I shall happily give way.

I am delighted to be able to tell the House that, as the report itself describes, real progress has been made since the last debate on televising some nine months ago. The Select Committee received three different proposals—from Commons Committee Television, the company which is currently responsible for providing coverage of Committees, Thames Television, and United Artists. The Committee welcomed all three schemes, details of which are set out in the report, as representing

"a serious and commendable attempt to bring the goal of a dedicated channel nearer to realisation."

Having carefully considered the proposals and taken evidence from their promoters, the Committee concluded that the United Artists scheme was

"the most thoroughly worked out and immediately practicable of the three".

This proposal involves live continuous coverage of the House of Commons, supplemented by extended coverage of the other place and of Committees. Later, material from overseas legislatures might be added. The service will be distributed initially by low-power satellite to cable heads

and will thus be available to any cable subscriber at no additional charge. The cost of the service will be borne entirely by the cable operators.

It is true that the potential reach of the service will be fairly small initially, at some 260,000 households by the end of this year, but on the latest available estimates from the cable industry, that figure is expected to rise to some 4·6 million households by the end of the decade. We should not lose sight in this context of the example of C-Span in the USA, which also started from small beginnings and has now developed into a full dedicated channel providing comprehensive coverage of Congress and its committees.

The Committee also hopes that it may be possible, subject to discussions involving the Independent Television Commission, for the service to be transmitted via one of the transponders on the Marco Polo satellite, which, as the House may know, is used for the moment by BSkyB. This would have the great advantage of removing any geographical limitation on the availability of the service, as anyone possessing, or willing to purchase, a so-called 'squarial' would have access to the channel.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Leader of the House does not seem to appreciate how important televising the proceedings of this place is to the democratic process. We ought to consider television as a televised *Hansard*. The idea of the televised proceedings being available through United Artists to 260,000 cable recipients, perhaps increasing to a certain number, is pathetic. We should fund the service here, as our major contribution to the democratic process. Cannot the Leader of the House grasp that point?

Mr. MacGregor: That point was much discussed throughout the deliberations of the Committee. I make three points to the hon. Gentleman. First, the dedicated channel is in addition to the other televising of Parliament that we have been discussing, which is available to everyone through the medium of broadcasting generally. Secondly, a substantial cost is involved in dedicated channels, and we have had proposals under which the cost will be met by the operators. Thirdly, as I have said, exactly as has happened in the United States, the number of people who will be able to see a dedicated channel through the cable system if they wish to do so will be fairly small in the initial stages. There will be considerable scope for expansion.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my right hon. Friend comment on two points? First, he said that the Committee had come down in favour of the United Artists proposal. He should recognise that, although a majority of the Committee were in favour, it was a fairly narrow majority. It was by no means a unanimous decision. Secondly, my right hon. Friend must concede that at no time in its latter deliberations did the Committee make any effort whatever to solicit interest in the whole franchise. For that reason, if for no other, it is clear that many commercial interests which might have wished to put in a bid were denied the opportunity to do so.

Mr. MacGregor: Throughout its proceedings, the Committee took its view. Some of its conclusions were reached on the basis of majority vote. Throughout, it was able to hear views such as the one that my hon. Friend has just expressed. As my hon. Friend knows, when he made his point in the Committee it did not command majority support. However, what I am about to say should help to deal with what he has said.

The Select Committee has urged United Artists to begin immediate negotiations with HOCBUL—and, of course, its successor, PARBUL—about its participation as a full member of the company. The United Artists proposal was one of three in front of the Committee, and was generally regarded as the best. We have made it clear that, while that proposal deserves every encouragement, it should not be regarded as the last word, and that others should feel free to come forward with schemes if they wish. That offer stands.

I note from the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) that he wishes to see a dedicated satellite channel

"under the direct auspices of the House".

I cannot see what purpose this would serve, when United Artists is perfectly willing, through the cable industry, to fund its own proposal, which, I stress, will be subject to the same parliamentary control in all essential areas as the main televising operation. Nor do I share the hon. Gentleman's faith in the ability of the House to manage an undertaking such as a dedicated channel. The arrangements that we advocate are not only a very considerable advance on the situation to date but the most effective way of going forward.

Incidentally, the Select Committee has not, contrary to the hon. Gentleman's amendment, opened the door to commercial exploitation of the signal through the United Artists scheme. All that the Committee has done—as is clear from the published minutes of proceedings, which are included in the report—is to refuse to rule out in advance the principle of sponsorship for a dedicated channel. But I emphasise that any specific proposal of this sort—we have had one already from Thames Television—would require the Committee's express authority.

I hope that the House will agree that the United Artists service, which will begin in the autumn, represents a major step forward. I believe that it is very close, in spirit at any rate, to the sort of proposal canvassed during earlier debates by a number of hon. Members.

The other place has already agreed to its own Broadcasting Committee's report, which sets out permanent arrangements for televising similar to those contained in the report of the Committee in this House, which we are discussing today. I am sure that many hon. Members will have read the report of the debate in the other place, in which, the corresponding report received a very general welcome. If this House approves the motion now before it, the next step will be for a public tender to be held, leading to the selection of an operator responsible for providing the integrated coverage. It is hoped that the name of the operator will be known by the end of June. Subsequently, new licences will need to be granted to PARBUL by both Houses, assigning copyright in the signals to PARBUL, subject to certain conditions. The new arrangements will then be in place by the time the House returns in October from the summer recess.

The Select Committee has recommended in its report what I believe are sensible, practical arrangements for the future of parliamentary broadcasting. They are sensible because they provide Parliament with full and final control over the form of the signals; they will ensure an efficient and economical management of the television operation on an integrated basis, with clearly defined lines of

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responsibility; and they give the broadcasters the assurance that their own legitimate interests are protected and, in particular, that their money is used cost-effectively and that the signals are of a technically acceptable standard.

Above all, the proposed arrangements carry forward the essential features of a system with which we are already familiar, and which we know works. Finally, as a bonus, there is at last a genuine prospect that a channel dedicated to live, continuous coverage of our proceedings will be in operation by the autumn.

I commend the Select Committee's report to the House.

4.29 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"takes note of the First Report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c. (House of Commons Paper No. 11) but declines to approve a Report which fails to establish a Broadcasting Unit as a Department of the House as recommended in paragraph 106 of the First Report of the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House (House of Commons Paper No. 141, Session 1988-89), fails to provide a continuous satellite feed of House of Commons proceedings under the direct auspices of the House, and fails to prohibit the possible exploitation of the House of Commons' signal through commercial sponsorship.".

This is the third report on televising the Chamber since the House decided in principle, three years ago, that we should conduct an experiment. I have been a member of the Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c. throughout, as have a fair number of the other Members who serve on it. I had no hesitation in supporting the first two reports. The first was about how we should set up the experiment and the second was to assess how well the experiment had gone. The third report contains a recommendation for permanent arrangements for televising the House, and I am afraid that I cannot put my name to it.

I take that decision with some regret, because I have certainly enjoyed serving on the Select Committee and helping in the substantial extension of democracy that televising our proceedings has brought about. However, the report is flawed in two fundamental respects, which are referred to in the amendment.

I shall deal with those flaws shortly, but before the bad news that the Committee has not been able to agree on permanent arrangements, I should like to take the opportunity of referring to the good news about the experiment. Its result has been, as we all hoped, that unprecedented numbers of our fellow citizens can regularly watch the proceedings of the House and follow its debates. They see how well, or how badly, we react to the issues of the day.

Before I came to the House today I looked at some of the viewing figures of the principal programmes that use parliamentary material. I should never have expected those figures to be as good as they are—although they are not big in television terms. For example, the Channel 4 programme, "A Week in Politics", which has an unearthly transmission hour on Thursday night and is repeated on Sunday morning, has an audience of 200,000 to 300,000 on Thursday night and 100,000 to 200,000 for the Sunday morning repeat.

"Westminster Live", which carries Prime Minister's Question Time on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and also goes out on Wednesdays, regularly has viewing figures of between 600,000 and 700,000. The programme planners had great confidence—they had more nerve than I should have had—and decided to have a programme over-run last week which took some time from the world snooker championship coverage. "The Parliament Programme" on Channel 4 had a steadily increasing audience, despite having another bad transmission time—12 noon daily. About a quarter of a million people now regularly watch that programme.

It is a great achievement that so many people watch our proceedings and that we have an archive of those proceedings. For example, we now have on film the speech by the former Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), towards the end of last year, and the final speech as Prime Minister of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). We have those speeches on tape, and we can all play them and, certainly in my case, thoroughly enjoy them. That is an enrichment of our democracy.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although one or two individuals may still resist, the opposition to televising our proceedings has virtually collapsed in the House? The voices that warned of all that might happen as a result of the experiment—exhibitionism and a change in the character of the House—have been proved wrong. Televising the House now seems as natural as televising our party conferences, and as the reporting of our proceedings by *Hansard* and the newspapers. Television has come and it is never likely to go away.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend is right. Televising the House will probably continue to improve our procedures as we try to make them more relevant to the people watching and the people whom we represent.

It must be admitted, too, that television has meant that many, if not all, of us are seen more frequently by our constituents, although whether that will make us more or less likely to be re-elected remains to be seen. We all look forward to testing that theory as soon as possible.

Those viewing figures have been achieved despite the appalling slots that programme-planners have given to parliamentary coverage. I understand why the programmes have been given such slots—they will never achieve huge viewing figures—but I should have thought that it was worth trying to encourage the programme-makers to improve some of those slots and to move them from the twilight hours or the middle of the day.

I welcome much of the report. The Leader of the House spelt out several of the matters that I consider important. I welcome the improvements in Committee coverage and the use of remote cameras in Committee. I also welcome the idea of a central control room above Central Lobby. That makes use of space that would not otherwise be used and is an ideal location for a central control room.

I welcome some of the relaxation measures in the rules of coverage, although I believe that they do not go far enough. I have always believed that the job of trying to reflect what goes on in the Chamber should be left to television directors. It is their job to interpret the proceedings as they are seen from the Public Gallery. We restricted them greatly to begin with, but have become

increasingly relaxed and I do not believe that anyone has suffered. We should give the directors even greater freedom. Whichever side of the House disrupts our proceedings, the disruption should be intelligible to television viewers. For example, in the poll tax debate on 13 March, Conservative Members made a determined attempt to disrupt the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). I do not blame them for doing so, as long as it is within the rules. However, such scenes should not be cut away from what can be seen from the Public Gallery.

Our rules on "undue disorder" are also unduly restrictive. It is ridiculous to require a locked picture of you, Mr. Speaker, when disruptions take place in the House. Television viewers simply see you looking worried. If the disruption is intelligible to those in the Press or Public Galleries, the television director should be enabled to make it intelligible to television viewers.

Those are the parts of the report with which, broadly speaking, I am pleased. However, two fundamental areas in which the report sadly fails caused me to table the amendment. The first relates to the absence of a recommendation to establish a Department of the House to control and supervise television coverage. I should emphasise to those who were not members of the Select Committee that the arrangements that we established for the experimental period were designed for just that purpose—they were experimental arrangements for an experimental period. The Leader of the House had difficulty explaining exactly what PARBUL or HOCBUL mean. We made a meal of the arrangements and they were unnecessarily uncomplicated. If the report goes through unamended, it will recommend an unnecessarily complicated managerial structure for a simple operation.

The Leader of the House admitted in his speech that there is a ludicrous lack of proper financial control and management. I am surprised that a former Conservative Chief Secretary should have such weak managerial and financial control.

I would happily give way to the Leader of the House if he could tell me what the television operation is now costing. I have asked that question many times in the Select Committee, but it is extremely difficult to get an answer because the costs and responsibilities are divided among many people. There is no clear answer about the receipts from the television operation. Appendix 9 contains some complicated information, but anyone in any doubt should simply read paragraph 29 of the Select Committee report which encapsulates the financial shambles that it recommends. It is not good enough for the permanent arrangements to be run on such a basis.

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Gentleman cares to look at pages 38 and 39 of the report, he will see that the costs are set out clearly and simply. As a former Chief Secretary I can say that the information contained in those pages is far simpler to read than that offered in most costing operations of most companies in the public sector. The information is straightforward, clear and all there.

Mr. Grocott: I shall not betray in too much detail the look of bewilderment that crossed the right hon. Gentleman's face yesterday in the Select Committee when I asked him about receipts.

The right hon. Gentleman is aware that the responsibility for televising is divided between various sections of the House, the broadcasters and others. Those broadcasters represent a fluctuating group. New broadcasters will be employed during the recommended franchise period, which is not satisfactory.

It is also important to consider the Committee's recommendations on personnel management—the people whose job it will be to deliver the signal. Paragraph 16 of the Select Committee report talks of "bright young people" doing "short stints as operators".

Is that really the way in which we want to provide for the permanent televising of the House, particularly if we are to have a control room above Central Lobby? Imagine people coming here for three or four months, then going on to do "Emu's World" or "The Price is Right" and then coming back here for another three or four months. That is a poor way in which to operate the permanent televising arrangements.

I believe that the permanent televising arrangements should be the responsibility of a Department of the House. That was the clear preference in the first report produced by the Select Committee. The Leader of the House has admitted that. The right hon. Gentleman was not then a member of the Select Committee and it is significant that it is those people who have come on to the Committee since the publication of that report who have managed, with the right hon. Gentleman's casting vote, to vote down the recommendation for a Department of the House to be responsible for the televising arrangements.

Paragraph 106 of the Select Committee's first report states:

> "We wish to make clear that the reasons, mainly contractual, which persuaded us not to recommend a fully-fledged House Broadcasting Unit for the experiment would not apply if permanent broadcasting were introduced and that such a Unit remains our preferred solution for the longer term."

It remains my preferred solution. There are overseas precedents as almost every other country that televises its Parliament has established the equivalent of a Department of the House to do that job. The management of the House also offers such a precedent as *Hansard* is a Department of the House. Given that we continually refer to the televising operation as an electronic *Hansard*, we should establish a Department of the House to do the job.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman knows that I greatly respect his views and contributions to the Select Committee. I, too, have spoken in favour of a House of Commons fully fledged Department, which would be responsible for the televising arrangements, but I support the main recommendations of the Select Committee report.

The report has considered the proposals for a parliamentary broadcasting unit. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the House, because of its majority membership on the board of directors, will continue, effectively, to call the shots? We will therefore have all the advantages of a fully fledged House of Commons broadcasting unit, but we shall have none of the disadvantages associated with having to bear all the costs as others will chip in. Although that arrangement may be different from that adopted in other countries, does the hon. Gentleman accept that it serves to our considerable advantage?

Mr. Grocott: We already cover a substantial proportion of the costs, but, under the present arrangements, we get none of the receipts. Surely there is nothing simpler than

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to have a Select Committee responsible to the House and a Department of the House responsible to that Select Committee. Why are we making such a meal out of what is a simple operation?

Mr. Tony Banks: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. Since we are getting close to a general election and are likely to have a Labour Government, what would the Labour Government do? I hope that my hon. Friend does not consider that a trick question—it is not meant as such.

Mr. Grocott: I strongly believe that we should establish a Department of the House. There is ample precedent for so doing and it should be our preferred option.

A Department of the House would mean that the televising operation would be subject to better financial control, but, above all, I believe that that Department would do the job more effectively than what has been proposed.

The directors of the unit would be employed by the House and would be here permanently. They would be as familiar with the House and its operations as are all the other staff. It is all very well to say that bright young directors would be the ideal people to call the shots in the control room, but it would be far better to anticipate those shots than to react to them quickly.

When a Minister makes a statement, which is followed by questions, we know that that routine follows acknowledged rules. We all know who is likely to be called—I am sure most of us would say that it is rarely us. I had eight years away from this place and it took me at least two years to reacquaint myself with that routine.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Two years or longer?

Mr. Grocott: I am prepared to accept that I am still learning.

It is only when one has a feel for the place and knows those who have a particular interest in a particular subject that one can anticipate what might happen. If directors were full-time members of staff they would be familiar with the House. We would know them and we could talk and complain to them; just as we can to the *Hansard* writers. Surely that would be a far more effective way in which to operate the permanent broadcasting arrangements than to employ people on short-term contracts under a sub-contractor.

Paragraph 16 of the report claims that we would not be able to recruit people to do the job—that is a fatuous suggestion. We have managed to recruit an outstanding permanent controller of broadcasting and an outstanding permanent technical adviser. The Canadian legislature does not have the slightest problem recruiting people for such full-time jobs.

The report also asks how the employees of the broadcasting unit would cope with the problems posed by the recesses. It is as though people who work for television companies are fundamentally different from everyone else. Every other servant of the House manages to cope with the recesses. There is a balance between the excessive hours worked during a Session and the long recesses. I regret to say that Members do not enjoy such long recesses. Surely that balance could equally apply to those working in the broadcasting unit as it does to anyone else working in the House. There is an overwhelming case in favour of establishing a Department of the House to be responsible for the permanent televising arrangements. The present proposals will not stand the test of time.

The other crucial issue on which my hon. Friends and I disagree with the Select Committee report's recommendations relates to the dedicated channel. The clear wish of most hon. Members—we repeated it in the Select Committee report—is that there should be some facility for a continuous, unedited signal from the Chamber which should be available for people. They can then decide which bits they want to watch, just as people can come in and out of the Public Gallery or read the relevant sections of *Hansard* in which they are interested. Let me make it crystal clear that if the House wants that to happen we cannot will the end without willing the means. It is fatuous to pretend that it will ever be a wildly attractive commercial proposition, even when one is talking about audience figures of those that I mentioned for package programmes—about 250,000.

If an unedited signal went out all the time, the viewing figures would be much lower than that for most of the time. One has to compare those viewing figures, as a commercial proposition, with the viewing figures of some of the more popular television programmes. The 1990 record was taken by "Coronation Street" with 19·2 million. "Only Fools and Horses" had 17·9 million viewers and the World Cup had 16·6 million. Some of our most outstanding speakers would have difficulty attracting audiences such as that. It will never be an attractive commercial proposition to deliver an unedited signal to our constituents. I cannot say that I blame them. I should not want to sit endlessly watching such a programme. The question, however, is whether the facility should be there for people to use, if they want to do so.

That part of the report which deals with our pretty pathetic efforts to sort out a continuous dedicated channel is to be found in paragraphs 103 to 124. It is littered with hopes and expectations and is completely dependent on other people's commercial judgment. The fundamental choice that has to be made relates to whether our constituents should receive an unedited signal on the basis of the commercial judgment of individual entrepreneurs, or whether they should receive it as of right because the House wills that they should receive it as of right. I do not have the slightest doubt that the second choice should prevail. We should not say that the signal, via satellite, should be a loss leader for some company, or that it should be something nice for that company to put on its letter headings. Furthermore, it should not be possible for a conglomerate, based abroad, to decide that this would be a nice little and relatively inexpensive, from its point of view, function for it to perform.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not see any disadvantage in a loss leader. Such a loss leader is provided by C-Span in the United States. It is high-calibre, public affairs coverage that is interspersed with other material. That makes it a very good package. There is no harm in that. The problem is that in this country it could not go out on cable; it would have to go out on satellite to reach the population. That would result in a commercial cost that should be met by the House.

Mr. Grocott: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The Leader of the House was pretty woolly on the question of

this resulting in an exorbitant cost. If he has different figures, I hope that he will let me know. According to the report, the Independent Television Commission has said that we can obtain access to the Marco Polo satellite for a nominal rental. The only direct cost to this House would be the uplink cost of about £500,000. That is a lot of money. However, as a proportion of expenditure in other areas of our public life, it is fairly trivial. The Central Office of Information budget, for example, amounts to £180 million. Moreover, the Government's departmental advertising budget, as the National Audit Office has spelt out, amounts to about £200 million, £100 million of which is spent on media—largely television—advertising. If we are to believe the constitutional rule books, the fundamental job of this House is to supervise the Executive and to see that Government Departments do their job properly. For the House, therefore, to say that it is outrageous to spend £500,000 on ensuring that all our constituents have access to the signal is absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. Nelson: I apologise for intervening again, but the hon. Gentleman appears to be trying to give the impression—I understand that he speaks for the Labour Opposition—that he, like I, wants all his constituents to have the option of tuning into a dedicated televising of Parliament programme, but he is not offering that. Does he agree that the only way in which we could offer it to all our constituents would be by buying Channel 5 at enormous cost? We could make that decision, but that is not the hon. Gentleman's proposal. If instead he proposes simply to cover the cost, at public expense, of tuning in to a particular satellite, still only a very small minority of people will want to watch the programme. What, therefore, is he proposing on behalf of the Opposition? How will his proposals reach all the people who want to tune in to Parliament?

Mr. Grocott: I made it perfectly clear in our debate on the Select Committee's second report that for the foreseeable future the bulk of the people of this country will have to depend on getting any information about the proceedings in this House from the established main network channels and the packages that they provide. There is not the slightest doubt about that. However, I suggest that, via the Marco Polo satellite, which means via a squarial——

Mr. Nelson: It is minute.

Mr. Grocott: I agree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman—it is minute. If the hon. Gentleman is recommending that one of the main terrestrial channels should be taken over, I should find it very difficult to justify that to any of my constituents. It would be hard to convince them that BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, ITV2, or Channel 4 should be wiped out and given over to parliamentary coverage. It would not be too popular a proposal. Under my satellite proposals, initially, schools, universities and libraries would want access to it. However, every individual would have access to the signal by means of satellite coverage.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if United Artists were to say that that proposal should go ahead, the only difference would be that there would be no cost to public funds? It would do precisely what the hon. Gentleman proposes. It would use the Marco Polo satellite.

Mr. Grocott: I find this appeal amusing—"Please, is there a commercial operation out there, somewhere, to do the job for us? We don't think that it's important enough for us to ensure that our constituents get the signal, if they want it, so we just hope that some company will think that it is in its financial interests to deliver the signal." That is not good enough for me. What guarantee is there that six months from now such a company might decide that it was not in its commercial interests to continue the service? That happened with a cable operation not so long ago. We do not operate *Hansard* on that basis. We do not say, "We shall operate *Hansard* if we can, but we won't if we can't." It is a fundamental operation that should be available to all our constituents.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman knows that I am also interested in a dedicated channel, but he must make his proposition clear to the House and to others who take an interest in the subject. The fact is that the Marco Polo satellite is on its way out. I understand that it is being used by United Artists very much as a temporary measure. It will need to look for an alternative for its cable service. What does the hon. Gentleman suggest, once the Marco Polo satellite disappears? Has he encouraged his constituents to believe that they could receive a satellite service in that way? What will follow it? Does he suggest that the House should then opt for Astra, or some other satellite?

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman makes all sorts of speculations about what might happen in the satellite and cable industry. I am much less clear about the future than he is. However, I know that the Marco Polo system—the MAC system—is far better technically. Therefore, it is highly desirable that such a system should be preserved. However, that is not the question that we must address. We need to ask whether the House should provide the means for continuous coverage, to which our constituents can have access. The answer to that question should be emphatically yes.

As for sponsorship, we debated that subject in Committee and considered how to finance the operation without forking out the £500,000 which I guess it would cost to do it ourselves. One possibility which I emphatically wanted ruled out but which the Committee would not rule out was of the Commons signal being sponsored. That proposal is horrendous. There is nothing quite so amusing as the Tory party finding itself in conflict on two of its professed deepest principles. One is a great respect for our traditions, of which the House is one; the other is a great respect for the pound sterling and anything that might make a few bob. Sponsorship brings those two values into a horrendous collision.

The ITC has made it clear that news programmes cannot be sponsored, for the most obvious reasons. I do not like the idea of sponsorship for any programme for reasons which it would be lengthy and irrelevant to go into now, but the possibility of seeing on the television screen the message, "This signal is brought to you live via Arthur Daley Enterprises," is horrendous.

If Conservative Members even contemplate the idea, let them be consistent. If the electronic *Hansard* were to be sponsored, why not *Hansard* itself? Why could we not have

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company logos on the front of *Hansard*? Why not have the Strangers Gallery sponsored, with company logos displayed on it? We might even have company hospitality suites, where people could watch Prime Minister's Question Time with drinks and smoked salmon. That seems to be the logic of the commercial approach. I see hon. Members nodding, but no one wants to say anything. I will gladly give way to any hon. Member who thinks that we should have company hospitality suites.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Since my hon. Friend is talking about commercial matters, may I tell him that my speeches are now available on an 0896 number for 35p a minute at the off-peak rate. It is the only service on that number where the heavy breathing is at my end.

Mr. Grocott: I hope that the possibility of the Commons signal being sponsored is as ludicrous to everyone as is the suggestion of sponsorship of the other two means of communication, *Hansard* and the Strangers Gallery. The Select Committee could at least have ruled that out by voting for my amendment.

We come back to the two fundamental differences which make it impossible for me to support the Select Committee report. As a Select Committee we had the job of recommending a permanent system for televising the proceedings of the House—a tremendous advance in our democracy which has been enormously successful. The report, unlike most Select Committee reports, was never going to gather dust. It was to provide the guidelines for operators, for the basis of the financial arrangements and for the way in which we should deliver the signal to our constituents. I fear that we have produced a rambling shambles of a document which does not address the two key issues but comes up with a botched compromise which is inconsistent. I hope that my hon. Friends and many other hon. Members will support the amendment.

5.3 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I should like to start by paying tribute to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as chairman of the House of Commons Broadcasting Unit Ltd. The role of the Chairman of Ways and Means has not been fully recognised. It may yet continue to be important in any survivor to the HOCBUL arrangement. I should like to say on behalf of the Select Committee, if I may, that the House is grateful to you for what you have done in that regard.

Tributes are due from lowly members of the Select Committee, first, to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who picked up the baton at a difficult time and who managed the proceedings of the Committee with great skill, sensitivity and leadership. It was also appropriate that one member of the Select Committee was elevated to be Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. Through your chairmanship of the Committee, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and through that elevation, the Committee had a new influence.

Hon. Members who have followed the matter since February 1988 feel that it is of great consequence, and that what the House has achieved in implementing the televising of its proceedings is nothing less than a major constitutional step in democratic progress. Those who would cast such things aside and make light of them fail to recognise the great benefits that televising has already brought to parliamentary communication and public understanding of our proceedings.

It has rightly been pointed out that many of the alarmist fears expressed in 1988 have given way to a recognition that it is in our interests and in the public interest for the House to be televised. Far from the procedures or the cherished traditions of the House being abandoned, by and large they have carried on much as before. The only change for the better is that people can see more clearly and understand not just by listening or reading what we are about.

I give two major examples in the last year, the first more uncomfortable than the second. During the leadership change in the Government, I believe that it was important for the public to see what was happening in the House. They were entitled to judge by the contributions and emotion of the House the decisions that we were taking. Uncomfortable as the aftermath may have been for some of us, I believe that what happened has been vindicated by events and judged by television to be right. The new leader of the Government and of the Conservative party is an outstanding leader who comes over extremely well to the public.

The second example was the Gulf war. I remember vividly being in the Chamber during the emergency debate on the Falklands, as will other right hon. and hon. Members. On that great, sensitive and important occasion, there was no television. The public were unaware of the emotion of the House. It was up to us vicariously to report it to our constituents. During the Gulf war, there was great public interest day by day in the statements in the House and in the representations of hon. Members on behalf of constituents.

All the people have been able to use the new medium to see the democratic process at work through a visual report which did not exist previously. I profoundly believe that Parliament has taken an historic step forward in introducing the televising of the House and that future generations will be indebted to its courage in making that decision.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend has said that the public can now see great, important and sensitive decisions. He is right, provided news editors consider that those decisions are great, important and sensitive, but great, important and sensitive decisions which affect tiny communities such as the Scottish fishermen are being, and will be, denied the very coverage to which my hon. Friend thinks they are entitled.

Mr. Nelson: I agree with my hon. Friend. I should like to see more regional coverage and more television coverage of Back-Bench contributions on issues of importance to our constituents. However, I disagree with him to the extent that I feel that much of the coverage would never have taken place before. There is more net television coverage of regional and individual issues than ever before. It is a net benefit, and a great step forward. More could be done to draw attention to regional and individual issues, and that is part of the debate about a dedicated channel.

I want to turn to future arrangements and the setting up of a parliamentary broadcasting unit. As I said in an earlier intervention, although I respect the point of view of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), I believe

that we will have the best of both worlds under the proposed arrangements. As we will have a majority of the board members of the new broadcasting unit, we will have control over a body which will be spending a sizeable sum of money—some £2 million this year—broadly half of which is the cost of the broadcasters. The other half covers the cost of the House of Commons and the Government. So it will be half private sector and half public sector, but wholly in the control of the House. There would have to be pretty compelling reasons for us to insist that the private sector made no financial contribution, although that would not result in any substantial benefit in terms of the control or direction of the broadcasting unit.

It is important to remember that nothing is immutable. We can change things. If it does not work out and a broadcasting company defaults, the matter can come back to the House and we can make other arrangements. However, after the tried and tested experience of the experimental period, why should we reject a contribution from the broadcasting companies, which in my view have been generous and responsible in the way in which they have conducted those affairs, and insist, perhaps for some ideological reason, that the entire cost should be carried by the House? I do not think that it is necessary, and if we can mitigate the cost, so much the better.

We will also have to consider carefully the arrangements for a permanent channel. I have said in previous debates that I would like as many people as possible to be able to tune in to a debate of their interest —not just to see the highlights on the news at 6 o'clock or 9 o'clock but to see an entire debate. Only by listening and watching an entire debate can those interested in a particular matter get the full flavour and meaning of the issues being debated in the House. We will find that there is an enormous latent audience interested in particular issues.

Experience in Canada suggests that, when there is a debate on agriculture, a vast community of people who are directly affected by the issues and decisions of their legislature will listen in. Many of them will watch the debates more avidly than Members of Parliament and become extremely well tutored and informed. Admittedly, they will then put pressure on us as their elected representatives, but if we are aiming for a more informed public debate about major issues, we have everything to gain and nothing to fear from a dedicated channel.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good point. He is right to say that global viewing figures give a completely misleading impression. We should be looking at the different interest groups that will watch different debates at different times according to the subject that is being discussed. All those interest groups add up to some pretty impressive viewing figures.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Research carried out in Britain and abroad shows that a surprising number of special interest groups would benefit from such access. It should be our business to communicate to them by making that signal available.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that it was not technical problems that were holding us back. I believe that technical problems are holding us back. If it were now possible at a reasonable cost to have a terrestrial channel available so that our constituents could switch to Channel 12, for example, and watch the proceedings of the House in the same way as people can watch the proceedings in Canada, I would be in favour of that, and I would be prepared to vote for rendering public moneys for it.

Half our job is to do our job and the other half is to communicate what we are doing. It is an important part of our votes and our proceedings to spend money on telling our public and our representatives what we are doing. If it could be done at a reasonable cost, and the technology allowed a terrestrial channel, we would vote in favour of it. However, it is not possible.

I understand that only one terrestrial channel is available in addition to the four existing channels, and that is the proposed Channel 5. It would be difficult to argue on an opportunity cost basis that we should take that channel. Apart from the fact that the costs would be enormous, we would be denying many other franchises and companies that wished to use it. For the time being at least, and largely for technological reasons, we are limited to providing a dedicated channel by means of either a cable message from the House or via a satellite communication to those who receive it directly from a satellite or those who receive their television on a cable, which in turn receives a message via a satellite.

It matters not to me whether the satellite that communicates our signal is of a new or old variety, providing that it does the job. The key question is how many people will be able to tune in and obtain the dedicated channel from the cable system. Under any of the options currently available, a relatively small proportion of the viewing populace will be able to see our dedicated gavel-to-gavel proceedings, whether we adopt the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) or the line taken by the hon. Member for The Wrekin. We can only move with what is available.

The proposals made present the opportunity of immediacy rather than further delay before our public are allowed to see a channel dedicated to the proceedings of the House. We have the opportunity to reach many more people than we do currently and much more gavel-to-gavel continuous coverage of entire debates. As that is a practical proposition that will be available from the autumn this year, the House ought to buy it.

For all those reasons, I believe that the proposed organisation and medium of communication are reasonable, practical and viable. It would be a further great step forward if the House were to approve the Committee's recommendations tonight.

5.17 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I shall be voting for the recommendations that have been made; I shall also support the amendment for which I voted in Committee.

In my view, we should have a broadcasting unit as a Department of the House. I accept what the Leader of the House said, that there is parliamentary control over the method that the Committee proposed. I also accept his view that the reason that we have got no further is purely financial and not ideological.

Some years ago, when I was chairman of the all-party group on televising the House, when televising the House was not as popular as it became after the experiment, I visited a number of different parts of the world where the legislatures had broadcasting units.

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A broadcasting unit is not some left-wing ideological idea. The first time I saw it was in the United States of America. The Senate had a broadcasting unit that we visited. Those who worked for it were employees of the Senate. Just as Mr. Speaker plays an important part, although not directly, in the way in which the experiment is conducted in the House and the cameras are used, in the Senate that comes under the general guidance of the Leader of the House.

As the years develop, we must bear in mind that broadcasting unit—an electronic *Hansard*. As the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said, who knows what may happen next year? The hon. Member for Chichester and I may disagree when we vote, but in the past two or three years that we have been on the Committee we have followed lines of thought as far as we thought possible and then, six months later, on the advice of the staff who work to us, we find that a chink of light appears and we move in a direction that we had not thought was possible. Over 200 years, *Hansard* has developed in a particular way and has a world reputation for what it does, but there must be an electronic *Hansard* as well.

I want to deal with the location of the broadcasting unit, whatever its name. In our report we disagreed with the conclusion reached by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee that the new control room should not be sited within Central Lobby. We went up the Central Lobby tower—I did not even know it existed—to see what it was like. It was like a 1930s version—I am old enough to have seen it—of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". It is extraordinary. One felt that if one put a foot wrong, one could float or perhaps fall down. In the report, we reiterate our preference for the Central Lobby tower as the location for the proposed integrated control room, and we recommend that that solution should be adopted by the House, provided that the remaining practical difficulties can be overcome.

As I have said, I am in favour of a broadcasting unit. It should be located in the House and not across the road. We would not put *Hansard* across the road in the Queen Elizabeth II buildings. *Hansard* belongs to the House of Commons. It is important that it is here for security reasons, let alone all the other reasons for its presence here over the past 200 years. I sometimes think that those with whom we argue do not have the right idea even about the Committee's proposal for something that is not a full broadcasting unit. They think that it is something to do with the BBC, the Independent Television Commission or those television people, and that the best place for it is away from the House of Commons, because it is a slight nuisance and not a real adjunct to the work of the House.

Our experiment has shown that the televising of Parliament is as important as *Hansard* and is having a profound effect on the way in which the British people look at the House of Commons and the way it works. The attitude of some in the House is similar to a story that I heard when I was in the Royal Air Force at the beginning of the war. The RAF had used carriers for planes before the war. The Royal Navy guided the small carriers and the RAF did the flying. A naval captain would not turn his vessel into the wind because he believed that the advice from the young RAF personnel was nonsense. Until the planes went into the sea, he was not prepared to listen to a new idea. He believed that it was nothing to do with the Royal Navy. Some people seem to think that the televising of the House is not part of the House of Commons and that it should be located with the broadcasters. They seem to believe that it can be brought in with wires or something of that sort.

I have sat through all our deliberations in Committee mainly to speak in support of the idea that the integrated control room should, if possible, be located in the House, and the central unit should be above Central Lobby.

Regional coverage is one of the good things to come out of the televising of Parliament. Northern Ireland, where I was earlier this week, picks up the contributions of the 16 Members who attend the House from the Province. When I return home to my native Wales, I see that it picks up matters concerning that area. I am sure that the same happens in Scotland. I wish that it happened in the English regions. I imagine that London Members miss out, because everything tends to be national. However, at least something is happening on regional coverage.

I am glad that more is to happen on Committee coverage. Over the past two or three years, all the members of the Select Committee have spoken in favour of Committee coverage. I hope that it will go further. In the autumn, there will be another step forward. The work in Committee, particularly when we have a dedicated channel, will be of great interest, if not to people in general, to interest groups concerned with certain aspects of legislation.

As I have said, some years ago I was the chairman of the all-party group on the televising of Parliament. I was moved by the feeling that the spread of democracy demanded that people should see what goes on. Even now, some things are not understood. If this debate were being televised, people would ask why so few Members were in the Chamber. In fact, I am cutting a Committee upstairs now. Many other things take place here than just a perpetual meeting of the "city council". However, many of the great occasions or events, such as the virtual disappearance from political life of the previous Prime Minister, will enliven a discussion for centuries to come.

I wish that we could have seen the debates on the American colonies that took place in the Chamber round the corner, between Pitt and Fox. It would have been wonderful to comprehend the real arguments. Nowadays, they are over-simplified. In the new book about Lord Halifax, "The Holy Fox", I read another interpretation of the events of 1940 when Winston Churchill became Prime Minister and Lord Halifax nearly became Prime Minister. There are bits of that that would not have been shown on television. As late as 1941—I am sure that the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) was not aware of it; I was not—members of the Government were having discussions with the Germans in Switzerland. Had I known, I would have been less keen on what I was doing. That would not have appeared on television, but one would have been able to see the mood of the House.

We are not doing this for historical reasons, although that issue arises. The televising of Parliament is an important social and political development. It has not ruined newspapers. It has made some of the superficial reporting of the House almost redundant. Newspaper

commentators who look at this place in depth have not had their work made easier, but one reads them in a different context when one can watch events on television.

I commend the report. For the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) I shall be voting for the amendment, because that is the way that we have to go. I voted for it in Committee. In general, it is an excellent report and we should commend the Leader of the House since he has taken over the chairmanship. We should also commend the Supervisor of Broadcasting and his staff, without whom we would not have got nearly as far. We should also commend the Clerks of the Committee. Hon. Members attend every couple of weeks and express our views, but the work is done by others.

We are moving in the right direction. The televising of Parliament is of great importance. This is not the end of the story. It will develop in other ways. It is important that we have a dedicated channel. We have moved towards that, and it is important that we go further.

5.39 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I voted against the report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting and I regret that I cannot support it tonight. Like the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), I have been a member of the Committee since it first sat and, like him, I enjoyed its deliberations enormously. I appreciated the chairmanship of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham) and the present Leader of the House. The work of the Committee has added greatly to the appreciation of our work by those outside the House.

Until now, the Committee has sought to deliver the best to the House and to the public. It saddens me enormously to have to say that I believe that we are asking the House to accept second best.

When we began our deliberations, we were criticised for taking a long time to get the technology right and were accused of shilly-shallying. We were told, "We know that you are opposed to it; get the cameras in." We resisted that temptation and as a result of the work of the Committee, of visits to Canada and of our examination of the work of C-Span—which has been referred to often and to which I shall refer again—we were able to deliver state-of-the-art technology and an improved lighting system.

I should like to pay tribute to all the technicians involved and to the Supervisor of Broadcasting for their hard work, and to the Director of Television, Mr. Patrick Harpur, and the people working with him since televising began. The technical quality of sound in the Chamber may leave something to be desired, but the technical quality of the pictures has been first rate. That has been recognised in the United Kingdom and worldwide. It is a pity therefore that we are falling down badly in this report. Since televising the House began, it has been claimed that we are seeking to enhance democracy. Over and again, hon. Members have reiterated the importance of public access to the work of the Chamber. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) made much play of that.

The proposals in the report will not enhance democracy and public access to the Chamber but, sadly, will restrict them. If we adopt the report, we will put into the hands of broadcasters—the BBC and ITN—the editorial control of the television coverage of the House. We will be paying lip service to the concept of a dedicated channel, which, as the hon. Member for The Wrekin said, was determined in our first report. We will hand control to an American cable company. I have no quarrel with the professional ability and technical expertise of United Artists—I am sure that it will do a good job—but I question whether the Canadian Parliament would hand control of its dedicated channel to the Americans, or whether the Americans would give the control of C-Span to the Japanese. It is curious that the mother of Parliaments is preparing to hand to an overseas company control—without offering it to anybody else, which is the crucial point—of something that does not approach a dedicated channel.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, the Select Committee on Broadcasting considered offers from three companies. For what? For the provision of a dedicated channel. No one is interested in the scraps left by the BBC and ITN. It is inconceivable that any company considering a dedicated channel would consider those leftovers to be commercially viable.

Much has been made of the prospects for funding a unit at the House and a dedicated channel. I believe that they cannot be separated; they must be considered together. The Committee failed to grasp the fact that the production of a signal from the House and its transmission to the public by a dedicated channel should be inseparable. That is why the proposal is half-baked. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that the production of a signal from the Chamber and a dedicated channel would cost millions of pounds, but he did not quantify the figure.

I am sorry that I cannot agree totally with the hon. Member for The Wrekin, and I shall explain why later. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the public subsidy of public information services. My best estimate suggests that the House spends more than £450 million a year on public information services, such as the BBC World Service, S4C, the Central Office of Information and *Hansard*. That is a colossal sum. To pretend that the House has never set a precedent for subsidising information from the House is wrong. During the passage of the Broadcasting Bill, the House committed itself to spending £10 million a year to provide a Gaelic service to a maximum audience of 80,000 people, yet we are not prepared to spend less than that sum to carry the proceedings of the mother of Parliaments to the electorate of the United Kingdom. That is quite incredible.

I disagree with the amendment, because I do not believe that it is necessary for the House to provide that massive subsidy. A unit of the House, either by franchise or by direct control, should be able to sell its signals not only to the BBC and the independent television companies, which quite properly will want to use excerpts, but to overseas organisations such as CNN, C-Span, the Canadian Broadcasting Services, and to the Commonwealth countries and private industry. In the long term, such an operation, considered as a whole and not in part, as the report has, should be commercially viable. If the House has to underwrite that in the short term, that is entirely proper, because having voted the end, we should vote the means.

We have said time and again that the British public should have the right to see the proceedings of the House. The Select Committee on Broadcasting will consider a practice undertaken by the hon. Member for Banff and

[Mr. Roger Gale]

Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who showed Scottish fishermen in his constituency an excerpt from a debate in the House that was relevant to them. No one would suggest that that debate was of riveting interest to the vast majority of people in the rest of the United Kingdom, but it affected the livelihoods of fishermen in Scotland. They had a passionate and burning interest and naturally wanted to see it. Why did he have to take a cassette to his constituents so that they could watch our deliberations? Why were they unable to watch it on a dedicated channel? Answer: because, having willed the ends, the House refuses to will the means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester asked whether the problem was technical. The technical solution that we are being offered—again, I disagree with the hon. Member for The Wrekin—is a cable service that will reach a maximum audience of 250,000 people, and, by the end of the century, will perhaps reach 4·5 million people.

In my maiden speech, I advocated the development of cable. I am passionately committed to that development, because I believe that cable delivery will be the system for homes of the future, not only for television pictures and entertainment, but for home services, for data and for telephone. I have never made a secret of my belief, but it would be wrong to suggest that such a development will be rapid.

It would be even more wrong to suggest that it would not be many years—if ever—before large areas of the United Kingdom, and especially rural areas, received cable. Are we saying that people in rural areas—for example, the farming constituencies that I and many other hon. Members represent—shall not have access to the proceedings of the House? It is already available to them.

It is suggested that United Artists, having seized its opportunity to steal a march on the rest of the industry to provide the cable service to a quarter of a million people out of the whole electorate of the United Kingdom, should take the Marco Polo satellite dish, which was discarded by BSB, and deliver the signal to the home by that means.

There is no question but that, on the cheap, that satellite would be a good mode of delivery to cable head ends for United Artists. Nobody would deny that, but are we seriously suggesting that the people who have an interest in watching the unedited proceedings of the House will buy from a warehouse full of unused squarial technology that is already out of date? The hon. Member for The Wrekin said that it was a first-rate system. It is sad that, like other first-rate systems in other technologies, it is already out of date. To tell someone to buy a squarial is like today telling someone to buy a Philips cassette system.

Mr. Tony Banks: Or a Trabant.

Mr. Gale: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) mentions a Trabant. I hesitate to put the Marco Polo satellite and the MAC technology in the same class as the Trabant. The Marco Polo satellite is as out of date as the Greater London council. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West promotes out-of-date technology, because that is in line with much of his party's thinking on many issues. Marco Polo is about as much use as a flying dustbin, and we should recognise that. The MAC technology that has been developed is out of date. Successful digital television transmission trials are taking place in the United States, and they represent the technology of tomorrow.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Member, because, apart from his rather unkind comments about the GLC, he is making an interesting, useful and informative speech. He has far more technical knowledge than I, so I hope that he will tell us whether—as the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said—it is impossible to establish a terrestrial channel with an allocated frequency.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to the hon. Member for leading me to the end of my speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester said that the difficulties were technical, not financial. I must gainsay that. I noted with great care the criteria listed by my right hon. Friend when he promoted the report. He said that the criteria applied by the Select Committee were parliamentary control—quite rightly—cost-effectiveness and the fair distribution of costs. Not one criterion relates to the public availability of the proceedings of the House. My right hon. Friend also said that the difficulties were not technical, but financial, whereas my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester says that it is not technically possible.

I wish to return to a point made by an hon. Member who is not here and whose name escapes me for the moment. He has done much work on the subject, and suggested a while ago that there should be a dedicated channel as a prerequisite to the televising of the House. I supported his amendment to the last report. We were told that we were trying to obstruct further televising of the House, but the Committee went ahead and persuaded Sky Television, with help from British Telecom and Astra, to provide a channel. For one glorious fortnight at the start of the experiment, when the cameras were first switched on, there was gavel-to-gavel coverage—as the Americans would say—or mace-to-mace coverage as we would prefer to say. There were no technical problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester will intervene in a moment if I do not answer his unasked question. Technically, delivery is possible, but who can receive it? The answer is, people with Astra satellite reception, Sky or whichever system one chooses which goes directly into the home. Such systems are now readily receivable. Anyone in the United Kingdom who wants to receive the broadcast can do so. It is clear that, for the foreseeable future, the majority of people in outlying areas that will not have cable will have to rely on satellite reception, not only for the televised proceedings of the House but for the many entertainment services that will be developed.

It is possible for us to set up a unit of the House. The Select Committee saw the unit of the House that was established in Canada and the excellent OASIS information system enjoyed by Canadian members. Many of us have been to the United States—the work of C-Span has been mentioned several times. American citizens have not one, but two television channels from their Houses—or legislature—which carry not only the unedited proceedings, but valuable background information. The channels also operate when the Houses are not sitting.

In America, there has been no difficulty in filling air time on C-Span. Can anyone seriously suggest that, during the long and short recesses of the House, there is not a wealth of Committee material and material from another

place for which there is usually no time during ordinary transmissions? Is anyone suggesting that there would not be a demand for that?

Mr. Rees: I should have intervened when the hon. Gentleman mentioned the argument, which I support, for a Department of the House. I am concerned about the lack of facilities in areas such as that which I represent. For a long time to come, I do not envisage many people in such areas being able to tap into a terrestrial channel——

Mr. Tony Banks: Satellite.

Mr. Rees: —into satellite or cable. He is not answering the main question with which we are wrestling. What about the spare channel? I am not saying that we could have it, but the only way that people in my area could see the proceedings would be to use Channel 5.

Mr. Gale: The hon. Gentleman must concede that, technically, Channel 5 will also not reach the whole of the United Kingdom. That is a technical fact of life. The reception equipment for direct broadcast satellite is relatively inexpensive. Many people have already bought dishes in order to receive entertainment channels.

I find it hard to believe that people who want to receive the proceedings of the House—such as those in community centres or in businesses—would not buy dishes. A whole raft of organisations would undoubtedly want to receive the proceedings, but we are denying people the opportunity to do so. I am not talking about universal coverage. I am not saying that everyone who wants to watch will automatically be able to do so by a flick of the button on their existing television sets. That is patently not so. But what I am suggesting is far better than what is proposed in the report.

The Select Committee has failed the House—it is as simple as that—by not considering the whole package, by not inviting tenders or inviting willing broadcasters to come to the House, to work with us as a unit of the House but to take over the televising of the Chamber and then take the signal to the entire British public.

It is quite simple. If the Director of Television were to widen his shot to show the Chamber as it is now, the British public would see that this half-empty Chamber of the House of Commons is, if it adopts the report, going to vote to deny the public access to its proceedings.

5.49 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I hope that the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) will forgive me if I do not pursue the aspects of the report or the line of argument that he pursued. As he is aware, I do not command anything like his technical expertise about the different systems and options which may or may not be available.

Like the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), I do not share the apocalyptic view of the report expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Select Committee has done a reasonable job. Although the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South and I voted in different ways when we came formally to approve the report—I voted for the report—that does not mean that the right hon. Gentleman and I depart from the sentiment expressed in the Labour party's amendment. If there is to be a Division at the end of this debate, those of us who feel that these matters are important should register that fact in the Lobbies. However, I would hate to see the report fall at this juncture. I suspect that the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South and I share the same opinion about that, despite the fact that we voted in different ways at the end of the Select Committee's proceedings.

Of those deserving congratulations on the success of the televising experiment so far, I single out the broadcasters. I recall the original debate that was so skilfully introduced by the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), and I remember some of the dire warnings that were uttered on that occasion. If the word "apocalypse" is appropriate, I remember the apocalyptic speech of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and the dreadful warnings about what the horrible, awful, scheming, plotting and subversive broadcasters would do if, in our naivety, the House was collectively to allow the broadcasters through the door.

All political parties have rows with specific programmes, editors and certain aspects of editorial policy. When televising any set event in the Chamber or in a studio, the programme editor or director and broadcaster want to make a good, enlightening televisual package which viewers will want to watch and which will therefore help ratings and will, in the words of the BBC's charter, "inform, educate and entertain." At times we achieve all three in our proceedings in the House.

I pay a particular tribute, as other hon. Members have, to the Supervisor of Broadcasting, John Grist, and to Anthony Hall and the other people involved. Members of the Select Committee and other hon. Members who have had dealings with those gentlemen know that they are friendly, approachable and, above all, professional in their approach to the task.

I suppose that a slight pat on the back is due to the House of Commons for its wisdom in supporting the hon. Member for Chichester when he moved the original motion and for some of the side benefits that have accrued from televising. I would sum up the latter as being slightly smarter suits and slightly snappier speeches.

Other hon. Members expressed relief about the fact that the cameras have been here for the past six months. If one were to take a six-month slice of British politics since 1945, one would be hard pressed to find many more major dramatic events, ranging from a change of Prime Minister to the Gulf war, than we have had in the past six months.

The change of Prime Minister was a tremendous political and human drama, ranging from the resignation speech of the former deputy Prime Minister through to the outcome of the first ballot and then the marvellous debate on the Floor of the House after the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), announced her intention not to contest the second ballot. After the first ballot, the former Prime Minister was reminiscent of Gloria Swanson in "Sunset Boulevard." After the result of the second ballot the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was somewhat reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe because it transpired that Conservative Members did not, at the end of the day, prefer blondes.

Thank goodness all that drama is on tape. Future generations of school pupils and students will be able to see that living history enjoyed by hon. Members and the very few who were able to sit in the Press Gallery or in the Strangers' Gallery. Those events can be shared with future generations, and that is a tremendous tribute to the success of broadcasting.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

I recall the afternoon when the former deputy Prime Minister made his resignation statement. I agree with the hon. Member for Chichester. Many people throughout the country were able to say that they realised just how politically significant that event was because they could see the expressions on the faces of the other hon. Members around him and the face of one hon. Member in particular who winced at the comments that were being made. That brought the luminosity of truth to bear on political proceedings. Following that, there was no way in which politicians of any persuasion could present a different conception of the events that took place. That is a tremendous plus.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Member is right. However, that kind of issue is not at stake. The Select Committee's hearings at Thames Television revealed that for about £5 million topics other than selected news and general current affairs coverage could be broadcast. Other issues could be covered which are not so important to most people but which might be significant to a minority who would otherwise have to refer to *Hansard* and therefore lose much of the immediacy of what goes on here.

Mr. Kennedy: The hon. Member for Thanet, North referred to the fishing incident. Although the 90-minute debate about that was not available throughout the north of Scotland where it was of tremendous interest, a substantial package was shown on Grampian Television's regional wrap-up programme "North Tonight". No doubt aspects of similar debates would be broadcast in the south-west or in Cornwall and in the constituency of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). The regional components of the BBC and ITN allow for such coverage. The BBC has given commendable attention to the work of the Select Committees and has allowed specific points to be focused upon. I do not dissent from the point made by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). However, within the constraints available in the original scheduling, the broadcasters have done an extremely good job, given the scale of events in any 24-hour period in this building.

I want to make a few brief points about the report and the implications for the future. I support the view that we should move towards a dedicated channel. The hon. Member for Thanet, North was absolutely right. As we move towards such a channel, I hope that we will consider the OASIS and C-Span facilities which we saw in Ottawa and which are also used in Washington DC. Facilities for hon. Members in the Palace of Westminster would thereby be greatly improved in terms of the visual technology available in offices and elsewhere.

My second point relates to the rather vexed question of what is to become of the new control room and where it is to be located. I support the view expressed in the report that it should be within the Central Lobby Tower. I appreciate that the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee has expressed some anxiety about that and that it prefers the Millbank location to a location within the precincts of the Palace. Paragraph 61 of the report points out that there is much to be said for a secure on-site television interview facility inside the building—not just for the convenience of Members, but to prevent a recurrence of the sad events of recent times.

At the time of the change in the Tory party leadership, a media circus was in progress across the street on College green. Given the number of politicians who were trotting across the green to offer their opinions on that rolling news item over a period of about a fortnight, a blind terrorist with blanks who ran amok would have been hard pushed to fail to hit someone—probably a member of the Cabinet.

Similarly, special occasions such as the Queen's Speech and the Budget must now provide some of the best targets for terrorism in the world. Special prefabricated studios are now increasingly common on such occasions: broadcasters set them up so that they can use the Westminster backdrop, and they are illuminated in the evening.

Finally, I want to make a third-party point. In the Committee, I represent not only the Liberal Democrats but other "third parties" in the House with an interest in this matter. I shall not stray from the subject that, technically, we are discussing—the report—but I think that it would be inappropriate for me not to point out that the "third parties" in the House have traditionally complained about their lack of opportunities in comparison with the two parties that form the "usual channels" under our existing procedures. If television is a long overdue step towards opening up the House of Commons, I hope that it will also prove to be a welcome step in the direction of further full-scale parliamentary reform that will change our methods of operation completely.

The voices of the parliamentary prophets of doom have largely become siren, if not wholly silent—although I suspect that one voice on the Conservative Back Benches is not about to be silenced. Those voices that remain are, I think, discordant, for televising has now received the general acquiescence of the House. Given what has happened since the hon. Member for Chichester opened the original debate, many of the arguments against televising that were advanced then will begin to look as bizarre, absurd and unfathomable as the powerful and emotive arguments against votes for women that were voiced earlier in the century seem now. When we read the reports of those debates, we wonder how on earth the House of Commons could have been against votes for women. I think that future generations will find it equally incomprehensible that it took so long for us to introduce a measure that proved so welcome to both Members of Parliament and the public outside.

Although I share some reservations with the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South—although perhaps in a rather more optimistic fashion than other hon. Members—I hope that the report will put us on a firm footing for the future.

6.3 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): As someone who is in no way connected with the communications industry—and as somewhat of a reactionary, who can offer only limited support to the view of democracy—I rise to speak with some trepidation. However, I welcome the report, and congratulate all those involved on the work that they have done on so difficult and complicated a subject.

I do not wish to speak in detail about the various technical aspects of the report. My abiding interest lies with the effect that televising will have on our proceedings:

I am referring not just to the presence of the microphones, but to the effect on the character of the Chamber and on how it works. The House is very precious to all of us, and I am sure that we shall all do our best to ensure that neither television nor any other invention of the future harms us in any way.

I have read the amendment carefully and I regret that I cannot support it. I believe that it would lead to considerable expense, and to the appointment of many more staff at a time when the number of employees in the public sector is growing so much that it is becoming a burden on the rest of the nation. The least that we can do in making this experiment work is to contain costs, and not impose yet another charge on the long-suffering public.

For many years I was a fervid opponent of the broadcasting of our proceedings. I confess that I have now changed my opinion substantially. I feared that our proceedings would be trivialised, that the tendency of some hon. Members to play to the gallery would be accentuated and that behaviour in general would worsen. I am glad to say that, in the main, that has not happened.

Of course, the Chamber is still conscious all the time that its proceedings are or may be televised. I have noticed a tendency—especially among Opposition Members—to crowd behind the Dispatch Box to be sure of being in the picture. I hope that women Members will forgive me for adding that some of them tend not only to do that, but to wear their brightest clothes to ensure that they are seen. Those, however, are minor points; what matters is that televising our proceedings provides the news media with a valuable weapon—and I fear the news media and the harm they can do to the nation.

The media love confrontation and they love entertainment. The House, however, is about serious business, and it is by no means always confrontational. Certainly it is not usually as confrontational as it appears in the weekly quarter-hour broadcast of Prime Minister's Question Time. That regular slanging match does not do much for the House's reputation, and is rather untypical of our proceedings; it also gives a completely false picture of what political life is really about. A complex political situation cannot be summed up in one or two sentences. That was well recognised in the 19th century, when, for the first time, the popular press carried long reports of speeches by Gladstone and Disraeli—which were read avidly, line by line, by the mass of the population.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) pointed out that television broadcasts of our proceedings were often slotted into difficult hours when not many people were "looking in". That is because we are not show business here; we are serious business. That is the constant difficulty with television. Question Time shows potted politics, not real politics: real politics can be found in debates on Second Reading, in Committee and on matters of moment, not in a quick quip across the Benches.

As I said, the power of the media is already very great—some would say terrifyingly great—and is growing all the time. Scenes on television of, for instance, the relatives of hostages at the start of the Gulf war, and of the present suffering of the Kurds, have an immediate, powerful and moving effect on the mass of the population. The danger is that they may come to think that what they see on television news night after night is all that is happening in the world, or is the most important thing that is happening; and that may not necessarily be true. News broadcasts on radio are better and, I believe, give a more balanced picture. Television is where the cameras happen to be.

Select Committees are much televised at present. There is a danger, however, that the televising of certain Committees, in which a witness is being closely examined, could turn out to be the kind of show trial that we have seen in the United States. I do not like that. The televising of our proceedings will need to be watched very carefully. It still has great potential dangers, although the worst has not yet happened.

I should prefer a single channel to broadcast all our proceedings from start to finish. What a different picture that would give. We do not just want snippets. The other day, I happened to watch the entire coverage of the enthronement of the new archbishop of Canterbury. What an immensely powerful and impressive broadcast that was—and what a nation we are. What a show it was, with all the nation represented in that wonderful old Christian building. It was not just a snippet; it was a full report—and how good it was. There is an increasing tendency to see snippets—little bits like the things that one has with one's drinks before a meal, but they should not be confused with a real meal.

I welcome the controls on reporting and on the use of cameras in the Chamber, especially when disturbances are taking place. Television can be a hydra-headed monster and unless we cut off some of its heads from time to time, we shall be in danger. I support firm parliamentary control.

I hope that my next remark will not be taken amiss. Let us not be too grand and important here. There has been much talk about enhancing democracy, but I do not know whether the public in England really want democracy to be enhanced. In my view, the public are not usually interested in politics; they prefer sport and other matters. Of course, they make a general judgment at general elections, but they usually leave the details to us. They may be concerned about certain vital matters, such as capital punishment, immigration or the tax on beer, but they are usually disappointed about those important matters. So let us not be too grandiose in talking about enhancing democracy.

What is our job here? It is to control the Executive; to approve the taxes; and to oversee, as best we can, how the money is spent, and not, I hope, to pass too many laws, which is what, unfortunately, all Governments have done in recent years. Of course, we must also support the defence of the realm, back the police and encourage religion. We must be modest and thankful to be here and not think too much of ourselves. We must all try to do our duty and not hope to become televison stars.

6.11 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): That was a speech that I never expected to hear in this place and I am sure that at one stage the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) never thought that he would make such a speech. I would have bet my pension on the hon. Gentleman remaining one of the last opponents of the televising of Parliament in his normal exotic fashion—not in terms of dress, but in terms of his views because he is one of the last remaining genuine political cave-dwellers in this country. Nevertheless, I heard him say that he had changed his mind. I had thought that it would be a truly Pauline conversion, but in the end,

[Mr. Tony Banks]

however, it was only half a miracle. The water was not turned into good red-blooded wine, only into cocoa. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying what he did because, like several other hon. Members who opposed the televising of Parliament, he has now realised that it has been the great success story that many of us said that it would be. It has been a success for television itself, but, far more importantly, it has been a success for this place. Although the hon. Gentleman portrays it very differently from me, I know that he cares about this place just as much as I do.

As hon. Members of all parties have said, televising has had a double effect. It has greatly extended the public's knowledge and awareness of our proceedings and it has greatly extended our activities in reaching a wider public, which is something that we are here to do. There is not much point in our discussing, quietly behind our hands and in anonymity, events that we then maintain are important to the country as a whole. If we take what we say at face value and believe that what we are doing is important to the country as a whole, the whole country must be able to hear and to watch what we are doing and what we decide in the public's name.

Contrary to all the fears that were expressed initially by the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge and others about the effect of televising on the reputation of Parliament, the House of Commons has been enhanced rather than reduced in the eyes of the electorate and our reputation now stands higher than it was before televising began. There have not been the rows and the scenes of hooliganism that the Jonahs were foretelling. No one has done a runner with the Mace since televising began—although it happened twice before. No one has attempted to pull off Mr. Speaker's wig in an attempt to get a bit of cheap publicity. There have been no streakers and we have had very little crowd violence. Indeed, behaviour in this place has improved since televising began. That is not because hon. Members are conscious of the cameras, but because behaviour in this place is fairly good in comparison with legislatures around the world. As I have said, the Jonahs have been confounded and we have a great success story on our hands.

Having said all that, however, the televising leaves a great deal to be desired. It is still the broadcast journalists who decide what parts of our proceedings will be broadcast—what they consider interesting, sexy or educative. We should not allow journalists—broadcast or otherwise, although broadcast journalists tend to be better than newspaper journalists—to act as a filter between what we do in this place and what the electorate outside is allowed to receive.

The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) referred to a debate on Scottish fishing. The people of Newham, whom I represent, are not necessarily very interested in that, but I know that many of my constituents are interested in and greatly affected by the late night orders on social security, housing and transport. But the broadcast journalists do not regard those subjects as interesting. By that, they mean that those subjects are not interesting to the broadcast journalists themselves. We should not allow that state of affairs to continue.

The report's proposals are inadequate. I cannot accept the idea that only 250,000 people will be permitted to see the parliamentary broadcasts and that that is somehow a major advance and that, perhaps, by the end of the decade 4·5 million people will be allowed to view. Those are optimistic figures. Let us face it, Sky and BSB came up with a lot of figures about the number of people that would be watching their channels by the end of each year and usually vastly under-performed against expectations. We have seen what happened to BSB—it could not maintain its audience—and we now know that Sky is experiencing problems. That is why we cannot rely on the figures that we have been quoted or expect to see them fulfilled.

I believe that all hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge—my constant references to him must impress upon him the fact that I have still not got over his speech—are now prepared to accept, as the hon. Gentleman did, that parliamentary democracy has been enhanced. The hon. Gentleman, however, did not seem very interested in extending knowledge and awareness of democracy much beyond the House. Whether he likes it or not, more and more people are now more and more interested in and aware of what we are doing. That must be good for us and for parliamentary democracy.

If we agree that the televising of Parliament has been a success for parliamentary democracy, why cannot we go further? I listened to what the Leader of the House said about the provision of a dedicated channel being a matter not of technology but of cash. The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) then said that it was not a matter of cash—although he was interested in the cash aspect—but a matter of technology. I also listened to the hon. Member for Thanet, North, who knows far more about these technical matters than either myself or most hon. Members, and wanted to push him on why it is not possible to have a terrestrial channel. What would be the cost of re-engineering? The frequencies are allocated by the Home Office and, constitutionally, the Home Office and the Home Secretary are answerable to the House. As we can vote on such matters, can we not vote in the money and ensure that the technology is available?

Mr. Gale: The short answer is, practically, no. A terrestrial channel is not available—or rather, although nothing is impossible, it would be difficult to provide. If one is prepared to take entertainment away from a large number of people, it would be possible to make a channel available, but the only practical way in which we can have a dedicated channel is by direct broadcast by satellite and by cable.

Mr. Banks: I would like more information from the hon. Gentleman. We cannot deal with the matter in this debate but perhaps we could discuss it outside. He did not rule out the possibility of an extra channel. Would it be possible to re-engineer so that we need not deprive people of their entertainment on Channel 3 or a potential Channel 5? Is there no way in which one could squeeze in another terrestrial channel? If the hon. Gentleman says that it is technically impossible, I will accept that. However, if he says that it could be done at a price, we come back to the argument of what is the price and the value of democracy. It is a Wildean approach to know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Often one feels that that is the attitude of the Government. If it is a matter of cost, we

must be prepared to meet that cost. The value of democracy is infinite in those terms. If we desire the ends, we must will the means.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I do not believe that the House would want to say that infinite costs could be borne. I hesitate to refer to the Richard Dunn question, which also came up in Committee. Some broadcasters would have preferred the Committee, and by extension the House, to ask for proposals for the widest possible Mace-to-Mace coverage. That point does not seem to have been fully grasped. We have tended to deal with the cost element and say that there is no extra cost other than that of the control room—I exaggerate slightly. Instead, we should have asked what proposals commercial companies, the BBC or some new person could make at a reasonable cost.

Mr. Banks: Again, this is not the way to exchange information on the subject. I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to speak. My feeling is that we should be prepared to bear whatever cost is necessary. We are talking about something that is perhaps beyond cost. We are talking about the value of democracy to us in Britain. If we have said that televising the House has enhanced democracy and reinforced the democratic process, we must take the logic further and take what we have done until now to some logical conclusion. Of course, we want Mace-to-Mace or gavel-to-gavel broadcasting. We want to allow the people of Britain to turn on and tune in to the subjects in which they are interested. They should not be restricted to the subjects which the broadcasting journalists say that the people should receive because the journalists have decided that those are the interesting subjects on today's menu. To me that means that we have gone so far, but there is an awful lot further to go.

I hope that the Committee will continue to keep the matter in mind and that at some point it will come to the conclusion that the money should be spent. No one can disregard other people's money. We are talking about not our money but that of the taxpayers. I hope that the Committee will say that the value of democracy is such that the House is prepared to will the means to meet the end of furthering democracy in Britain.

6.22 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I must confess that I, too, am one of the Members who changed their mind on this issue. However, my conversion was much earlier and more absolute and complete than that of my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes). When I came to the House eight years ago and had my first opportunity to vote on the basic issue of televising, I voted against. I was taken to task mightily by my erstwhile colleagues in the parliamentary Press Gallery for having done so. It was not as a result of their criticism that when we came to the second vote in my parliamentary lifetime I voted for televising. I did so because I was absolutely convinced that the time was right to make the change. As many hon. Members have said, events since then have proved that we took the right decision in 1989. The attendance in the House for this debate is proof that we took the right decision.

The controversy has gone completely out of the main issue. We are now arguing about the details for the future. That has aroused considerable differences of opinion among the hon. Members attending this debate, as it did among those of us who served on the Select Committee on Broadcasting. But those differences of opinion are pretty small beer compared with the main issue and the controversy which raged at the time of the two votes about which I have spoken. We all remember that the Chamber was absolutely packed. People on both sides of the argument felt passionately that the parliamentary world would either come to an end or be transformed once the cameras arrived. As we all know, as is so often the case, the truth was somewhere between those two extremes. Life has gone on.

The tributes paid earlier, especially by the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), to the broadcasters were right and proper. It was the way in which the broadcasters handled the televising of the House that made a success of it. The tributes paid to the Supervisor of Broadcasting were also appropriate. He has played a quiet, silent part behind the scenes which, again, has contributed mightily to the success of not only the experiment—which was the difficult part—but the permanent televising of the House.

I wish to deal with the items of controversy tonight. I am unashamedly in favour of keeping the status quo. The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) went somewhat over the top. As he did in Committee, he said that the report was a shambles and the arrangements were a shambles. He said that the present arrangements would not stand the test of time. With great respect, the arrangements have stood the test of time since they were introduced. The experiment began in November 1989. The remarkable thing is that, both as a member of the Committee and in my previous incarnation as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the previous Leader of the House, I have heard no complaints about how the system has worked. Therefore, I am wary about overturning the system and introducing different arrangements.

I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) that he opposed the first report of the Committee. He will correct me if I am wrong. He drew up a minority report. So he was not quite right when he gave the impression in his speech tonight that the Committee had performed splendidly until now but had suddenly gone wrong and off the tracks. He will be honest enough to admit that he has been a consistent critic of the way in which the Committee has gone about its work. In saying that, I am praising my hon. Friend: he has been consistent. He has held firmly to his sincerely held view, which is that the House of Commons should go into the commercial world and exploit the opportunity to televise the House. He believes that we should do deals with various people and obtain a return on the right to televise the House. He believes that that will open the way to greater television. That is one view.

As I said in Committee on several occasions, my view, which is counter to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North, is that if there is any body of people less able to run a commercial activity it is this House of Commons.

Mr. Tony Banks: What about *Hansard?*

Mr. Harris: That is a false analogy. People have given the impression that *Hansard* is freely available to everyone.

[Mr. Harris]

It is freely available, provided that one lives near an HMSO shop or is prepared to pay the postage and that one is prepared to pay for a copy of *Hansard*.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman would not run anything commercially then?

Mr. Harris: I shall come to that in a moment. I have in my hand a copy of the daily edition of *Hansard*. The price is £6. I confess that I was not aware of the price of *Hansard*. Members of Parliament go to the Vote Office and get it at no charge, and probably send copies to constituents who ask for them. [HON. MEMBERS "Oh!"] If someone has a particular interest, it is only right that he should get a copy. I am sure that the Liberal Democrats do this on a greater scale than Conservatives do. However, I shall put that issue aside. The Leader of the House will correct me if I am wrong when I say that, even at a price of £6 per copy, *Hansard* is not run at a profit, or even at break-even level. Indeed, it is run with a thumping great subsidy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North has argued with absolute consistency that televising the House represents a great commercial asset that we should exploit by making it readily available, through satellites, to more people. That is my hon. Friend's basic approach. My point is simply that we are not equipped to do that.

Mr. Gale: I know that my hon. Friend has no desire to misrepresent my views. I have said consistently that there are two ways forward. One of them is by unit of the House and subsidy. That would be a perfectly honourable course which some people would prefer. My preferred option is that we should not seek to run the system ourselves—which is what my hon. Friend suggests I have been saying—but should offer the franchise to somebody else who does want to run it.

Mr. Harris: That is what my hon. Friend has always said, but he wants us to enter into various commercial deals. He goes further by saying that, to start, we might have to do pump-priming. The system that we have has worked very well. So far as the costs of the House are concerned, we have limited liability.

Let me address the arguments of both the hon. Member for The Wrekin and my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North. It is absolutely certain that the cost of running a service as a unit of the House would be far greater than the cost of the present system. All those manning the television cameras, directing and doing everything else would be employees and would have to be paid throughout the year.

Mr. Grocott: Will the hon. Gentleman please develop his comparison with *Hansard*, and will he try to be consistent? It takes about £2·5 million of public money every year to produce *Hansard*. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that an electronic *Hansard* should not be funded publicly, even though it would cost far less? What is the fundamental difference between the two? If there should be commercial exploitation of the electronic *Hansard*, why does the hon. Gentleman think that there should not be commercial exploitation of the written *Hansard*? I assume that that is what he means.

Mr. Harris: Why get involved with subsidies if subsidies are not needed? The hon. Gentleman would like us to use under subsidy a satellite system which, apparently, is available to United Artists. That would not be necessary if United Artists were to go ahead and provided exactly the same service. I am against providing subsidies if they are not needed, and I believe that in this case a subsidy is unnecessary. Similarly, the present system is much cheaper than a House unit would be. Why should a system that has worked perfectly satisfactorily be disturbed? I believe that it will continue to work perfectly satisfactorily.

On the question of a dedicated channel, there has been misrepresentation, not only of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in his opening remarks but also of the Committee's report. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North engaged in some rubbishing. He implied that we were going down the United Artists route—as if the matter were set in concrete. Let me remind my hon. Friend of what the report says:

> "By the same token, we believe that the United Artists scheme, whilst deserving support, should not be regarded as the last word nor as excluding or pre-empting any other proposals for a dedicated channel which may come forward in the future."

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made the same point at the beginning of this debate.

This House has taken very wise decisions about the televising of its proceedings. We are going forward in a perfectly sensible way, which need not alarm people, as it has worked very satisfactorily in the past. I thoroughly endorse the proposals of the Committee, and I hope that the proposed amendment to the motion will be rejected.

6.35 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I want to begin by paying a particular tribute to the people who helped the Select Committee in its work. The Supervisor of Broadcasting, Mr. John Grist, brought his lifelong broadcasting and television experience to our aid, and gave us most skilful and sensitive advice throughout our deliberations, which lasted three years. I pay tribute also to the people who direct the programmes, as well as those who are in charge of the technical facilities. In addition, our thanks are due to the various Clerks of the House for their work in the preparation of this and other reports. They listened to our sometimes slightly rambling views and, in the end, distilled them into what looked like extremely wise words. Thus, we have a very readable report.

From the beginning of the discussion about the televising of the proceedings of this House, my view has been one of some scepticism. I have always felt that the proceedings of the House could be transmitted meaningfully to the outside world only by way of a dedicated channel. I am one of those who were slightly bothered and cautious—in some ways, alarmed—about the way in which, in the early days, some reports might come out. I did not take the sensational view that only the most ludicrous and frothy parts of the proceedings would be broadcast, but I did believe that the public would not often see the true depth of discussion, either in the Chamber or in Standing and Select Committees.

Over a period, the broadcasters have done an excellent job. As a London Member, I have one criticism, which may well be shared by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). There is not sufficient coverage,

in London regional programmes, of work relating to the metropolis. The local coverage in other regions is rather better. Of course, in London, television is very much about national events.

We should still aim single-mindedly at an "electronic *Hansard*"—that is the expression that has been used, and it sums up the idea of dedicated coverage, gavel to gavel, for the benefit of the British public, whatever region they live in. People would not then have to travel to London to see what we are doing or queue to join the rather select few who get into the Strangers' Gallery. Our ultimate aim should be coverage that would enable sombody sitting at home to follow his own special interests. Whether they be crofters in the north of Scotland, workers in industrial centres, fishermen living on the coast, schoolchildren or people employed in the financial centres, everyone should be able to watch the proceedings of the House on television.

We should have a dedicated channel, and the nub of our debate is how to go about it. The obvious suggestion may seem that we should choose a terrestrial channel, because at present that is how most of the population receive television. But, technically, terrestrial broadcasting is not the method that is ultimately likely to reach the most people. In some remote areas of Scotland and Wales, and in parts of the south-west, television signals have to be re-broadcast for the benefit of people in the most inaccessible places. Ultimately, the best method of transmission will be by satellite.

The Committee has decided that a halfway stage—several of my hon. Friends have pointed out that this is only a halfway stage—would be to invite a cable transmission company to broadcast the signal. We certainly invite further investigation of how we can best broadcast to the widest spread of people, and I hope that the House, the Select Committee, and indeed the Government, will continue to be prepared to consider a public subsidy for a satellite signal.

I do not suggest that we go to enormous expense which was unacceptable to the Treasury and the taxpayer. The cost of acquiring a satellite dish is still, I gather from newspaper advertisements, about £200. Although people can rent a facility if they wish, we cannot yet justify a claim that very many people wish to receive a satellite signal. Within two or three years, however, satellite broadcasting will have reached such a stage that the House, the Government and the Treasury should consider paying for a signal to be transmitted by satellite.

I intend to support the report, but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will take on board what I have said. I believe that I am in tune with the views of many of my hon. Friends and of many members of the public.

I do not think that we need a unit of the House to carry out the work. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that the present arrangements are satisfactory. We have the expertise of the permanent members of staff—the Supervisor of Broadcasting and those who advise him. I am not convinced that we are equipped to recruit other people such as camera men and technicians. In all honesty, the sort of work that they have to do is not the most inspiring form of work imaginable for a television camera man, and the sort of staff that we now get through a contract with an outside company would not be attracted by it. The present quality of work is very high, and I hope that, by continuing the present method of contracting, we can ensure that that is maintained.

Finally, we have to decide on the control room. That is the "parish pump" item in the report, on which several hon. Members have already commented. I wish to put on record my view that the area above Central Lobby is the most obvious place for the control room. We must remember that we are shortly to enter a joint arrangement with the other place. It is logical that the control room for transmitting the signal from both Houses of Parliament should be in the building, and where could be more logical than at the central point between the two Chambers? Technicians there would easily be able to keep in touch with us, and there would be secure interview rooms available for Members of both Houses. There is no doubt where the control room should be.

6.47 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I shall make an abbreviated speech as I often appear to nowadays, and shall cut out some of the tributes that I planned to pay. However, I still pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, to the members of the Select Committee on Broadcasting &c. and to those who serve that Committee. Its report is one of the better reports in terms of canvassing the issues, but I am sorry to have to say that I disagree with it in one respect. For financial reasons, we seem to have gone for a short-term decision. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) serves with distinction as chairman of the Conservative media committee. The fourth appendix to the report of that committee spells out the options more clearly. It says, rightly, that the present experiment should be continued, and that people should be asked to come forward with proposals, which could include public subsidy, on how the continuous televising of Parliament can be made available to many more people much earlier.

It is not satisfactory to say that, for the sake of £3 million, Parliament should be broadcast on cable rather than by satellite. The report is right to point out the problems involved in using the squarial system—everyone knows that that is not likely to be available for very long.

I shall ask a technical question which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House may not wish to answer immediately. The Select Committee's recommendations refer to United Artists "or any other" group willing to send out the continuous signal. Does that "or" also mean "and"? Might there be exclusivity for United Artists if it pursues its proposal? So long as it is an "and" issue, that will remove one of those problems. There remains only the issue of whether the House could say to an outside broadcaster, "If we were willing to put more money in, how much faster could you make the system available, at least during the next few years?".

My final point will not be the most serious one that I have ever made in Parliament: why do not we set up a Dr. David Reid society? He was the mechanical-electrical engineer who produced the ventilator system that did not work and was sacked in 1852. I presume that he reported to a Select Committee, which shows that Select Committees can make mistakes. Whatever decision the House makes this evening, we should be prepared to see whether we are holding back from getting the full benefit from the work of the Committee that produced the report.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

Now that it has been discovered that there are 25 rooms above Mr. Speaker's house, perhaps we can use those instead of destroying that wide, open space that I look forward to seeing soon.

6.50 pm

Mr. MacGregor: In the short time available, I shall touch on some of the points that have been raised in the debate. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes), I was at first opposed to televising Parliament, for three reasons. I believed——

Mr. Tony Banks: Another miracle.

Mr. MacGregor: As a former conjurer, I know about miracles, but this was not one. I believed that the House of Commons was a place of work and that there was a danger of distorting its image and making it seem as though it was a place of entertainment. I thought that it would encourage Members to play to the galleries. Above all, I was concerned, as were many other hon. Members and as has been expressed in the debate, that much of the real work of the House, which takes place in Standing and Select Committees, would be neglected if only the Chamber were televised, thus distorting the view of the House's proceedings. However, I came round to voting for the televising of our proceedings in the debate when it was decided to do so. That was partly because I thought that it would improve democratic communication—I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) that it has done so—and partly because I thought that it might go some way towards stopping some of the rowdy behaviour in the House.

Having observed the public's reaction to the televising of Parliament, I believe that it has been a healthy and worth while change. I am always impressed, when I go around my constituency and others, by how often people say that they have listened to debates and taken on board matters that they would not otherwise have thought about.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge, however, that there is still a danger in choosing to televise the sensational moments in the House, which are untypical of this place, and to highlight them in news bulletins. We still face that problem. I have discovered that I also face a personal problem with the televising of Parliament because, sitting where I do, sometimes for a long time, without contributing to the debate and sometimes having been up for most of the night, I am tempted to yawn and, as sod's law applies, that is often the very moment when I appear on the screen. I have also realised that some viewers are good lip-readers. In the past, members of the Government talked about confidential matters that we had been unable to discuss outside the Chamber. So if I appear to be yawning, I am simply covering my mouth so that lip-readers cannot see what I am saying.

I agree that the televising of Parliament is worth while. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester said that he was satisfied with the parliamentary control over broadcasting. The fact that nobody has criticised that aspect in the debate shows that the House is now satisfied with the mechanisms of control.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees)—I am sorry that I missed his speech, but I was taking part in a television broadcast—talked about the importance of regional coverage, particularly in Northern Ireland and Wales. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy)——

Mr. Kennedy: Skye with an "e".

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, as a Scot, I understand that.

It is an important part of broadcasting our proceedings and partly answers the argument about a dedicated channel and the concern of some hon. Members to have our proceedings broadcast throughout the country, including in rural areas. I find that the attention given to regional matters on regional television is quite extensive and very important. Those of us who come from rural and regional areas believe that that aspect is important.

Mr. Kennedy: And Scotland.

Mr. MacGregor: Scotland is not the only place that the House should consider; the argument applies also to the regions of England.

It is noticeable that everyone who has spoken about the control room has argued that it should be in the House above Central Lobby. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), I believe that, although there is more technical work to be done, his worry about the impact on that area is exaggerated. We would not wish to go ahead unless we were satisfied that the space could be used without a detrimental effect. Everyone who has spoken on the subject feels that the control room is an important part of the arrangement because it does not concern the other broadcasters—the normal broadcasters and channels—but the House's own broadcasting operation.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye also mentioned security. I very much agree with him about such matters as I am often in the vulnerable position of being interviewed on the green outside. For the first time today, I have been to 4 Millbank to participate in a broadcast and was impressed by the space and lavishness there. The hon. Gentleman suggested that, for security reasons, we could use the space above Central Lobby for interviews with other broadcasters. Perhaps in due course we can implement some of those suggestions as it will be advantageous in terms of access and security. However, we cannot discuss that today as the debate concerns only the operation for broadcasting Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) has a much greater technical knowledge than I could possibly have about dedicated channels and I listened with interest to his remarks. The House accepted his technical expertise when he said that if we were to do anything other than broadcast by satellite or cable, we would have to remove a broader channel, which would include entertainment. I doubt whether the House would be happy with that. However much we want greater democratic communication and more people able to watch a dedicated channel, we must recognise that parliamentary proceedings will always be a minority interest.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who made an excellent speech, said that if we are to have a dedicated channel we are not excluding other arrangements but talking about progress. We are moving towards a dedicated channel and, if that can be achieved with United Artists, I hope that it will move well beyond an audience of 260,000. My hon. Friend the Member for

St. Ives quoted paragraph 122 of the Select Committee's report. Paragraph 124 is important to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham. It says:

"We therefore propose to monitor closely the progress and performance of the United Artists scheme. In particular, we intend to keep under review the position regarding the potential number of viewers with access to a dedicated channel, especially in the context of the availability of additional channels on the Astra 1C satellite in two or three years' time."

When that is added to the recommendation that we made in paragraph 122, it shows that we are embarking on the dedicated channel approach but are not excluding other proposals in due course, as technical possibilities arise or for other reasons.

Finally, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) referred to the arrangements as a totally unnecessary and complicated managerial structure—a botched compromise. Frankly, it is not. Several of my hon. Friends have already said that it has worked extremely well during its operation. It is not a complicated structure to understand—it involves all those connected with parliamentary broadcasting.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin referred to financial control and I believe that our arrangement is an important aid to that. When it comes to sharing costs, the broadcasters want to know that the way in which we have structured our part of the operation ensures good control over costs. It is important to have a cost-effective scheme. The arrangement to go out to tender ensures that we have such a competitive scheme, which is the best way to exercise control over costs. There is no problem about the overall audit and financial control.

The hon. Gentleman has displayed his instincts on other matters as well as broadcasting with his desire to set up a public sector organisation, totally funded by the taxpayer. Our approach of going out to tender ensures a competitive element in the service, a more flexible system and the most cost-effective way in which to achieve that service. It also limits the cost to the taxpayer by obtaining contributions from the broadcasters. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and others that that is the sensible way in which to proceed.

I was struck——

It being Seven o'clock, Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded pursuant to Order [29 April] to put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 70, Noes 155.

Division No. 134] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Greville
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Meacher, Michael
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, Dave
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Trimble, David
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John

Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c., in its First Report (House of Commons Paper No. 11).

Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

7.12 pm

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for the fact that we are having this debate. I hope that it will become a regular feature of each Parliament. We are debating the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. It is appropriate, therefore, that Parliament should scrutinise fairly regularly both his work and that of the Health Service Commissioners. Moreover, while he remains within our jurisdiction, we should also scrutinise fairly regularly the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration for Northern Ireland. All these matters are relevant to the debate.

We shall be considering in the debate what has come to be referred to as the work of the ombudsman. There is no difficulty about that person being referred to as the ombudsman. At one stage it was suggested by someone, who had better be nameless, that we should not be sexist —that we should refer to the "ombudsperson". I did not take kindly to that idea. The person who was in situ as ombudsman at that time was Lady Serota, a lady for whom I have the greatest admiration. I telephoned her and we talked about this. I suggested to her that the title should perhaps be ombudsperson. Her reaction was not couched in parliamentary language. She told me, in effect, "Don't be silly, Tony", but she used more abrupt terms than that. Therefore, we are entitled to continue to refer to the "ombudsman".

This is an interesting example of Britain taking over another country's democratic institution and adapting it for our own purposes so that we can provide a more efficient service for those whom we have the privilege to represent. The roots of the ombudsman go right back to Scandinavia. The original ombudsman was the people's man who spoke up at the court of the Vasa kings. He had a pretty tough and rugged role to play. People such as Charles XII and Gustavus Adolphus were very tough people indeed. The ombudsman had a perilous life in those early times.

The first constitutionalised ombudsman under the Swedish system was Mannerheim—a Finn and a relation of the great Marshal Mannerheim who so courageously led his nation against the assaults of the Russians. He was a great man.

The work of the ombudsman is relevant, as is the role of the Select Committee, of which I have the privilege to be Chairman. I was grateful, some while ago now when there was a change of Government, that, although a strong case could have been made that the post which I hold should be held by an Opposition Member, there was agreement on both sides that I should continue in office. I am very grateful for that because, as I think hon. Members who serve on the Committee will agree, the work that we do is conducted on a completely non-party political basis. Witnesses would have difficulty in deciding which of us were Tories, socialists, Liberal Democrats, or members of any other party.

The ombudsman system is an interesting example of our adopting the democratic institution of another

country and adapting it for our own ends in order to make our system more effective and more able to react to the genuine needs of our constituents.

It is important to ensure that democracy remains relatively efficient. If it does not do so, the electors are likely to turn, as a matter of expediency, to the extreme right or the extreme left. It was because democracy became so hopelessly incompetent that it failed in the cradle of democracy—Greece. There the Greek Government, under Mr. Canalopoulos—a man of great academic distinction—did not thrive. In political terms, he did not know his way round. I had the opportunity of meeting him on one occasion and found him to be a charming man. We are glad that democracy has once again been restored to that country, it having failed because the democratic system became so incompetent. Our system is effective. Democracy is a crazy system until one considers the alternatives, but it is important for us to ensure that our democratic system remains relatively efficient and reactive to those whom we have the privilege of representing.

It was with that in mind that the ombudsman system was introduced to this country. Among those who claim credit for it are Justice and the Society for Individual Freedom, organisations with different political orientations. The Government published a White Paper, Cmnd. 2767, which was followed by the introduction of the legislation which became the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967. That was a long time ago. I had the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee which considered the Bill.

Fears were expressed about the creation of an ombudsman. It was suggested by members of my party and of the Labour party that it might derogate from the role of the Member of Parliament. That has not happened. It was emphasised from the beginning that what was being provided was an additional bolt in the armoury of the Member of Parliament to help him the better to look after the legitimate interests of his constituents.

Since the establishment of the office of ombudsman in 1967, I have served on the Select Committee, save for the period when I was a Minister. The office of ombudsman came into being on 1 April 1967. There was comment about the fact that that was April fools' day but there was no significance in that. We are debating the subject on 1 May, Red Army day; again I do not think that there is any significance in the date, but there has been comment about it on the fringes of the press.

The first person to take up the office of ombudsman was Sir Edmund Compton. All who have been concerned with the affairs of the parliamentary commissioner agree that he set a very high standard which has been fully maintained by his successors. They have all been people of high calibre and great competence. The present ombudsman, Mr. Reid, carries on the high tradition and standards of his predecessors.

It was recommended by our Committee that the ombudsman should not always be an ex-civil servant. The Government of the day over-reacted and said that the next one would not be a civil servant. In the main the ombudsman has been an ex-civil servant. That does not matter, but occasionally to have someone who is not an ex-civil servant ensures that justice is not only done but is seen to be done. In fact, the former civil servants who have held the position and those who work in the office have been the harshest critics of their own profession.

The ombudsman system has been a success. The distinguishing feature of our system is the MP filter. A report 10 years after the establishment of the office emphasised that access to the ombudsman is a bolt in the armoury of a Member of Parliament. An interesting statistic which emerged from that investigation was that no fewer than 10,000 cases a year are taken up by Members of Parliament with Government Departments and agencies. No doubt the number is even greater now.

When a former Israeli ombudsman, Mr. Nebenzal, the doyen of ombudsmen, was giving evidence before us, he said that according to our system every hon. Member is an ombudsman. That is right. It is important that we continue so to be regarded. The parliamentary involvement distinguishes our system from those in other countries. Some academics have questioned the MP filter, but we should emphasise that our ombudsman is a parliamentary commissioner. It is right that he should adjudicate on abuses about which our constituents complain from time to time.

For the benefit of those outside the House who may not be as well versed as my colleagues, perhaps I should say how the system works. Like other hon. Members, I have regular surgeries in my constituency. A typical case will be that of a pensioner who thinks that he is not getting as much pension as his chum down the road. He goes along to the local pensions office where a clerk—no doubt a very nice person, but who may be having a difficult morning—does not explain the matter properly. The pensioner goes away and says, "I will go and see old Buck." He comes to my advice bureau, but probably I will not know the answer. I am like the original matches man. Like Lord Randolph Churchill, every time I see a decimal point I think of those damned dots.

If I cannot solve the problem, I take it up with the local office where it is solved in 90 per cent. of the cases. If I can understand the explanation, so will my constituent. From time to time, although rarely, the local office has made a mess of it and I am not satisfied with the result. In those cases I refer the matter to the ombudsman who goes through the books and checks every detail. He may ask why it took three weeks for an office to reply to a simple inquiry, why a person was wrongly categorised, and so forth. When he has sorted out the problem, the matter is referred back to the Member of Parliament.

The ombudsman has two aims: first, to ensure that procedures are tightened up so that there is a minimum chance of repetition; and, secondly, to ensure that there is redress for the complainant where that is appropriate. Therefore, the ombudsman has had a considerable sharpening-up effect on the whole Whitehall process and on the health service.

Over the years some of my colleagues have suggested that it is a bit much to drag down to London the boss of a regional health authority, the chief medical officer and so on. I do not agree. I think that it is salutary for the heads of Government Departments or for the holders of principal offices in the health service to have to answer to the Select Committee for things that have gone wrong. It is right that they should be subjected to the robust questioning of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and of the rest of us on the Select Committee.

On the whole, it has been a success story. The parliamentary role distinguishes our system from others throughout the world. There are ombudsmen in all parts of the Commonwealth. One could say that it has been a

[Sir Antony Buck]

growth industry in Commonwealth countries. There is an ombudsman in every state in Australia—they also have federal and military ombudsmen. In Canada there are ombudsmen in every province. An ombudsman in Alberta obviously felt that ombudsmen's rule was okay, which in my view was a little over the top as Members of Parliament are jealous of their position as champions of the people.

I believe that we should retain the original system whereby the parliamentary commissioner enables Members of Parliament to provide a better service to those we have the privilege of representing. The parliamentary role distinguishes our ombudsmen from those in other parts of the world.

The work load of the parliamentary commissioner and the Health Service Commissioner has increased steadily but not dramatically. It is cyclic. Immediately after an election the work load increases because we have all been campaigning on doorsteps and have had even more contact with our constituents than usual. Although the work reaches a peak soon after an election, it has grown steadily over the years.

We have to consider for how long one man or woman is able to be both the parliamentary commissioner and the Health Service Commissioner. At present our hard-working commissioner scrutinises every file that reaches his office. That is important as it enables him to remain in close touch with what is happening in his office. There are advantages in having both offices under the same roof from the point of view of staffing and the expertise that crosses the divide between the two roles, but I am doubtful whether the ombudsman will retain that schizophrenic role as both parliamentary commissioner and Health Service Commissioner. Mr. Reid who does such a splendid job and has such a good staff may well be the last ombudsman to hold both positions. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health for attending the debate. It is entirely appropriate that he should be here and I should be grateful for his comments on that.

In the past there have been difficulties concerning clinical judgment. That is a difficult matter. However, from time to time, distinguished medical practitioners have pushed their luck as to what is clinical judgment. Hon. Members may recall a case involving a lady in her nineties. She was transferred from one hospital to another at midnight or even later on a frosty night and, not surprisingly, she caught a cold and died. The medical practitioners had the nerve to suggest that it was a matter of clinical judgment whether it was appropriate for a lady of great antiquity to be transferred from one hospital to another at the dead of night when, had they but known it, there was a room available for her in the first hospital.

Clinical judgment does not come under our wing, but what is clinical judgment can be fairly broadly interpreted. Any medical man who tried to suggest that a case such as the one I have just adumbrated was a matter of clinical judgment would get short shrift from the present Health Service Commissioner. I would be grateful to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister about the complaints procedure in the health service.

The Select Committee recommended that matters on the fringe of clinical judgment should be dealt with by the commissioner assisted by two assessors in the same way as the Admiralty division uses assessors. If a case involved the possibility of maladministration in obstetrics or gynaecology, the commissioner would sit with an adviser from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. A second opinion procedure for dealing with complaints in the health service has been introduced and I should be glad to hear from my hon. Friend, if not now then in writing, whether it is still regarded as working unsatisfactorily. I still take the view that it would be appropriate for matters involving some degree of clinical judgment but which are on the fringe should be dealt with by the commissioner, assisted by proper advisers from the appropriate medical discipline.

The Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration also comes within our purview. I should like to pay tribute to the recently retired Northern Ireland commissioner, Dr. Maurice Hayes, who did a most excellent job in circumstances of greater difficulty than those on what is usually described as the mainland. He did a superb job. The Select Committee thought it appropriate not to be pompous and continually drag him over here, so we visited Northern Ireland on several occasions. It was great fun for us to have meetings at Stormont, and we are grateful for the lavish hospitality provided by both the ombudsman and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Ashfield nodding in agreement. I commend the work of Dr. Hayes and wish Mrs. McIvor, who has taken over from him, the best of good fortune. Dr. Hayes will be a difficult act to follow, but those of us who have met Mrs. McIvor have little doubt of her competence and ability to be a worthy successor to Dr. Hayes.

Publicity greatly concerns the commissioners here and in Northern Ireland. It is important that the work of the commissioners should be better known. The Central Office of Information has issued a series of pamphlets and there is also a video on the workings of the committee of the ombudsman and of the Select Committee of which I am Chairman. The video on the Select Committee of which I am Chairman makes the Chairman look exactly like Captain Mainwaring. The video is used in technical and educational institutes. A distinguished lady named Mrs. Whitehouse lives in my constituency, so I have to be sensitive about what I say about videos. It is a completely wholesome video and is a good example of the way in which we want to get the work of the ombudsman better known. The present parliamentary commissioner and the commissioner in Northern Ireland are anxious that their work be better known than it is. Those of us on the Select Committee agree with that. Opposition Members are nodding in agreement, so we have all-party agreement. Most of our work is not carried out on a party-political basis. I am glad of that; long may it continue.

The ombudsman story is one of limited success. Over the years we have brought into being an institution which enables us as Members of Parliament to give our constituents a better service. That is what it is all about. It is important that we provide a proper service to our constituents and that we make sure that our democratic system remains moderately effective. If we do not do so, people will be in danger of turning to the expediencies of the extreme left or of the extreme right. While there are robust hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Ashfield and some of my hon. Friends, that is a remote possibility. One of the barriers against anything unpleasant happening to our democracy is the existence of a healthy ombudsman system. I have considered only the

parliamentary commissioner and the Health Service Commissioner, but the same applies to the local government service, which does not come under the direct purview of the Select Committee.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister and the Opposition for allowing the debate to take place and to hon. Members for listening to me with such care and attention.

7.40 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I thank the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) for the way that he has introduced the debate. He has made clear the broad range of work with which the ombudsman deals, and I join the hon. and learned Gentleman in his thanks to Mr. Reid and his staff for the work that they have done.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have referred a number of cases to the ombudsman, particularly on social security matters. The cases have always been investigated thoroughly and to a high standard, and the conclusions have been fair and lucid. It is notable not only that the investigations satisfy my concerns that everything should be considered in the greatest detail, but that, by and large, the reports are not full of gobbledegook and I am able to send them to my constituents confident in the knowledge that they will be able to understand why the determination has been reached.

I welcome the opportunity for this debate, and congratulate the Select Committee on its proposal that the ombudsman's work should be debated regularly. I know that other hon. Members wish to speak because of the wide range of points involved, but I shall focus on the work of the ombudsman in the health service.

It is surpising that there are so few complaints about the health sevice to the ombudsman. In the annual report for 1989-90, the ombudsman recorded 794 complaints about the health service. In that year, in England alone, the health service dealt with over 7,477,000 in-patients. There are a number of reasons for the low level of complaints. First, by and large, people support the health service and there is not a culture of complaining about it. Too often, people tend to think that, although it did not go right for them and that there was something wrong, they will not complain because the NHS is a wonderful institution. It is a pity that there is not a culture of complaining because the organisation could learn and grow by examining mistakes and looking at where things go wrong.

The second reason for the low level of complaint is that people do not know who to complain to. They do not know whether they should complain to the same person whether the case involves their general practitioner, the receptionist, the hospital or the nurse. People do not know where to find that information.

Thirdly, people do not complain because they do not know what they can complain about. The hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North touched upon the difficult distinctions between clerical and administrative errors—something that has gone wrong because of a shortage of resources and just one of those things. Such distinctions make investigations in the health service more difficult than they are in some other Departments.

A significant number of complaints mentioned in the annual report showed that underfunding played a part in the problem. Paragraph 34 entitled "Charges for treatment" states:

> "Sometimes patients write to me alleging that they have had to pay for private care out of anxiety after a long time on a NHS waiting list."

If everyone who suffered pain and anxiety from being on a waiting list complained to the ombudsman, he would have an extremely full postbag.

Another source of complaint related to resources derives from discharge arrangements. In probably one of the understatements of the year, paragraph 18 states:

> "Pressure on beds means that hospital doctors do not usually want to keep patients in hospital longer than is really necessary."

The truth is that sometimes there is so much pressure on beds that the administrative arrangements which should be in place to deal with the care of patients on discharge go by the board. The shortage of resources does not make that acceptable, but it gives us an insight into why it happens.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): The hon. Lady opened her remarks by saying she was surprised how few complaints there were, given the millions of cases treated by the national health service. That is good news. She also heard my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) say that this is not normally a party political matter. I hope that the hon. Lady will not turn this rare opportunity to debate these matters into a party political debate.

Ms. Harman: I am not seeking to do that. Since a Minister from the Department of Health is present, I am seeking to raise some issues that were mentioned in the Health Service Commissioner's annual report. I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) has read the annual report——

Mr. Lord: Yes.

Ms. Harman: Then he will see that the issues that I have mentioned are raised by the ombudsman, and it is fair to include them in the debate.

Paragraph 11 deals with complaints arising from the amount of time that staff can devote to observing and supervising individual patients. Once again, that is a function not just of training, experience and organisation but of health service resources.

I predict that, next year, the work of the health service ombudsman will take a new turn, because there will be a new challenge with the internal market, which will lead to new areas of complaint. No doubt the ombudsman will receive complaints from people that they cannot go to the hospital of their choice, because that is not where the contract has been placed, or that there is no contract to purchase the sort of care they need, such as infertility treatment, sterilisation or treatment for varicose veins.

It will be interesting to see how the ombudsman responds to complaints that might, for the first time, arise from treatment undertaken overseas. Some of the extra contractual referrals in the internal market procedure will be to hospitals overseas. No doubt the Committee will want to look at how the ombudsman deals with complaints arising from treatment in French hospitals.

Mr. Lord *rose*——

Ms. Harman: I shall not give way again, because I want to press on with my remarks about the annual report.

The ombudsman's work is essential not only to address individual grievances but to be part of setting standards

[Ms. Harman]

and of supervision within the NHS. We need a three-way approach to ensure good quality care in the NHS. First, we should have a national inspectorate setting standards and monitoring the outcome—an NHS quality commission. Secondly, we need local accountability. District health authorities should be rooted in the interests of the local community, making sure that the health services in their area serve the local community.

Thirdly—this is where the ombudsman's work comes in—there must be rights for individual patients. That is why we have published a charter for patients. We require patients to know whom to complain to, what they can complain about and how long it will be before they can expect to obtain a response. Also, an essential part of ensuring good standards and adequate redress will be a no-fault compensation scheme.

I want to take the opportunity of the debate to raise cases in which something terrible has gone wrong but people cannot obtain redress through the ombudsman or the courts. The cases have been raised by hon. Members from all political parties. They are of patients other than haemophiliacs who have been given blood transfusions and, tragically, thereby have been infected with HIV. Some are very ill; some have died; but none has received a penny in compensation.

Davey, a 26-year-old chef from Scotland, was given a transfusion after a bone marrow operation to treat leukaemia. The operation was a success, but he was infected with HIV. He said that he felt that he had been given another death sentence: he had been given another illness for which there was no treatment or cure. A young man had an operation after a road accident and had an infected blood transfusion that gave him HIV. A London woman had a transfusion after giving birth to her baby. The baby was fine, but she was infected with HIV and has since died from AIDS. A seven-year-old girl from the north-west had a hole-in-the-heart operation. She is now a teenager, but her blood transfusion infected her with HIV.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) raised the case of a woman in her constituency, a lone parent, who was infected with HIV by a blood transfusion, but who is now dead. No compensation or redress can help her now, but she struggled with poverty as well as AIDS, and her four children were left with nothing.

When we have debated the issue, Health Ministers have denied compensation but have offered sympathy. We can all break our hearts about cases of men, women and children whose lives are overshadowed by the threat of AIDS, but they want not sympathy but justice. If there were any justice, they would get compensation. The Government were right to offer compensation to the haemophiliacs, but wrong to deny it to those who were not haemophiliacs but were infected with contaminated blood in exactly the same way. I hope that the Minister will announce that he will review those cases, but he must not delay because time is running out.

We must judge an organisation by what happens when things go wrong, as well as when things are going well. The annual report of the Health Service Commissioner says:

"The hallmark of a service which cares for its consumers is an open complaints system which provides courteous, critical and thorough investigation of grievances."

That is important, but it must also be a comprehensive system. A system is not working properly if it provides redress for some people but not for others. Our system of redress will not be satisfactory or comprehensive until it includes a no-fault compensation scheme.

7.52 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, because for a short time I was a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Later, I joined the Whips Office, but I have now returned to the Select Committee. I am therefore a retread on the Committee.

On returning to the Select Committee, I was disappointed to find that some of the issues that I had raised before had not gone away. I wish to mention three, the first of which is literature. Some of the leaflets that the Government produce on people's rights or how to claim are written in gobbledegook. They have improved—they have some colour and some pictures and are looking better—but I used to lecture civil servants on the relationship between the Member of Parliament and the civil service. I used to take a leaflet from the nearest post office and read it to the civil servants. At the last lecture, I said, "This benefit leaflet is for an 80-year-old lady. Do you understand it, because I don't?"

If the literature is not right, it is not surprising that many people set off in the wrong direction in making their claim for benefit, and continue to go wrong. The Select Committee found that such problems occurred because people were given the wrong information. Improvements have been made, but this is one of my causes and I shall return to it again and again with the Select Committee until leaflets are produced that people can understand.

My second disappointment is that we are still arguing about the vexed question of clinical judgment, about which I remember the Select Committee arguing with the British Medical Association. The BMA said that, if a surgeon operates on someone and finds something unexpected, he must make a decision on the spot. People understand that things sometimes go wrong, but the BMA said that we must not allow clinical judgment to be examined. The Committee said that, if the BMA wanted to keep out of the courts and avoid moving to the American system—medical litigation is widespread in America—it should let the ombudsman investigate such cases. We felt that that would be a safety valve.

The Select Committee accepted that a surgeon had human life in his hands, but I pointed out that so does an aircraft pilot. He probably has 300 people behind him. If he makes a mistake, 300 people may be killed. A pilot may have to appear before inquiries, so why should not doctors? I am disappointed that we have progressed little on that vexed question.

My third disappointment is the delay between a Member of Parliament making an application to the parliamentary commissioner and a decision being made. The parliamentary commissioner is working hard to reduce the delay, but it is still far too long. Employees of the health service and of district health authorities were cross-examined by the Select Committee, but were able to dodge by saying, "It wasn't us; it was the previous people, who have left." That is not good enough. They read prepared briefs but cannot answer our questions and say,

"The people have left." Insufficient improvement has been made in reducing delays. I know that the ombudsman takes this seriously and is working hard to speed up the process. The average Member of Parliament does not want to put a case to an ombudsman, because it takes so long.

I shall continue to push for improvements in those three matters. On the whole, the system works well. We have been well served by parliamentary commissioners. They have always been of a high standard, have treated the Select Committee with respect and have used it to back up the problems they face. That is what is special about this country. In countries where the ombudsman has no Select Committee, he is on his own. The local government ombudsman does not have a Committee, although he might have a committee of councillors. However, they often have vested interests, so they are not as impartial as a Select Committee.

I welcome the debate as an excellent opportunity for us to discuss the work of the parliamentary commissioner. I wish him well in the future and I am sure that the Select Committee will back him and that we shall have satisfaction. I shall continue with my three issues—literature, clinical judgment and delay.

7.59 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Like my colleagues who serve on the Select Committee, I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I have been a member of the Select Committee for a little more than a year and I have found it interesting and enjoyable. I am still on a learning curve with regard to the full range of activities of the Parliamentary Commissioners for Administration and for the Health Service. However, my experience of the past year has shown me that it is especially valuable to have a Select Committee that can call to account senior managment in health authorities in England and Wales and in health boards in Scotland. I particularly welcome the fact that Scotland comes within the jurisdiction of the commissioner on health service issues. It might be possible to widen that role in terms of his general responsibility, although that remains to be examined.

Of the complaints investigated by the commissioner last year, about 700 were new complaints, which must be initiated by Members of Parliament and, last year, 371 of my colleagues took the opportunity to initiate cases. That is commendable, although it represents only just over half the hon. Members who had the opportunity to do so. There may be a possibility of increasing that number in the future. Recently, the commissioner circulated to all Members an explanatory leaflet drawing attention to his role and to what can be achieved. He did so for the benefit of those who were unaware of his role. We can hope for an increase in the number of cases dealt with in the years to come.

The hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck)—who was about to leave the Chamber, but who has had a rethink—said in his opening remarks that each Member of Parliament is himself or herself an ombudsman. It is important to underline that role because it is missing in other countries that have an ombudsman. I understand that last year the number of cases dealt with by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration was just over 1,000. If we compare that with other countries, the number is rather small.

In November last year members of the Select Committee had the opportunity to visit Denmark and Sweden to consider at close quarters the work of the ombudsman in those countries. It was interesting to learn that in 1989 in Denmark, for example, the ombudsman dealt with just over 2,000 cases from a population of 5 million. In Sweden, he dealt with 3,000 cases from a population of 8 million. Those figures seem out of kilter with the figures for the United Kingdom, at least for England and Wales, where there is a population of about 50 million.

It must be understood that here Members of Parliament filter many cases and take them up directly with the authorities so that there is no need to take them further. There is no such system in Denmark or Sweden, partly as a result of their proportional representation system, which means that in many cases the individual does not know who his or her Member of Parliament is. There are no individual constituency Members of Parliament, so that would make such a system difficult. I am an advocate of proportional representation and it is important that when —I use that word advisedly—we move to a more proportional system we retain in some form the link between the Member of Parliament and his or her constituency. There is clear value in that.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) is speaking from a theoretical rather than a practical knowledge of proportional representation, of which some of us have more experience, I advise him to stick to his strictly first-past-the-post system, which is far superior.

Mr. Watson: With respect, I reject the advice of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). There are many examples of proportional representation producing a much more effective system of government than we have in this country.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): STV is the worst form of PR.

Mr. Watson: I do not want to get into that debate. I am not advocating a single transferable vote. I regard that system as no fairer than the current system.

I shall return to our visit to Denmark and Sweden. There is an interesting aspect to the role of the ombudsman in both countries. He has the right to initiate cases as well as to receive them from various bodies. In practice, the numbers that the ombudsman initiated were fairly small —about 70 in Denmark and about 160 in Sweden. There is an open door which might be of value to our ombudsman if he had the opportunity to take up cases that came to his attention in some way other than through a Member of Parliament. I am not advocating the idea that an individual should be able to take a case to the ombudsman—I believe that the filter of the Member of Parliament should remain.

Although we are not dealing in detail with the role of the ombudsman for Northern Ireland, it is interesting to read his report. I have met Dr. Maurice Hayes a few times and I know that he chooses his words carefully. In his report he said that he "invited sponsorship" in some cases. That is constructive because in Northern Ireland Members of Parliament must also channel cases to him. However, there have been a number of cases in which he has contacted a Member of Parliament to say that a case might

[Mr. Watson]

be worthy of examination. There might be a similar role for the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in England and Wales in the future. It is an idea to which the Select Committee might wish to give some thought.

Another area—perhaps a controversial one—in which the ombudsman might develop his activity involves his ability to investigate the police. In Denmark and Sweden, that role falls within the ombudsman's remit. We have a Police Complaints Authority, but there is some disquiet about the way in which police forces tend to investigate each other when there are complaints. That is unsatisfactory. Perhaps there is a role for the commissioner to consider complaints made by members of the public about the behaviour of the police. I shall give a couple of examples that arose in our discussions with our Swedish and Danish counterparts.

Perhaps the most noteworthy case that was referred to the Swedish ombudsman in recent years involved the behaviour of the Swedish police following the tragic murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986. The way that the investigation was carried out was considered in detail by the commissioner and his recommendations were not kind to the police. There was also an interesting case which may open a door that would be difficult to close in this country. There were a number of complaints made in Stockholm following a Sweden-England football match when the Swedish police cordoned off areas of the city and denied access even to residents of those areas. One can imagine the fuss about that. It was within the remit of the ombudsman to investigate and he did so amid considerable publicity, which is no bad thing.

There was an even more remarkable case in Denmark. Largely as the result of an investigation of the way in which immigrants were treated while they were held in police custody pending consideration of their status, a Government Minister was forced to resign because of evidence that emerged against him. They may not be typical cases, but they show that there is a role for an independent investigator of cases referred to him relating to police activity. The Select Committee should consider discussing with the ombudsman and with other interested parties whether we should broaden his remit in such a way.

I shall also comment on the ombudsman's role as the Health Service Commissioner. In the year to March 1991, about 990 cases were received by the commissioner, which is a record. Only about 15 per cent. of them were found to be worthy of investigation, but it is pleasing to note, particularly in light of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), that the numbers are increasing. That is partly due to the fact that the Government widely circulated leaflets about the national health service reforms over the past two years. Those leaflets appear to have brought to people's attention the fact that they have the right to complain through the commissioner.

The main issue to come to my attention in the Select Committee was the discharge arrangements that apply in hospitals. We heard about some pretty horrific cases and we subjected the health service managers whom we asked to appear before us to some fairly strong questioning and we did not by any means receive satisfactory answers to all those questions. It was part of the Select Committee's remit to demand that the health authorities and health boards that we questioned should report back to us on how they had improved their procedures as a result of our suggestions. It is also important to note that more than 50 per cent. of the cases investigated were upheld.

The health service ombudsman can investigate the NHS trusts that are now subject to some controversy. I hope that my colleagues on the Conservative Benches will not think that I am trying to make political capital out of this. In the near future the trusts at Guy's hospital or at Bradford royal infirmary might be investigated in terms of maladministration. At Guy's there is certainly prima facie evidence that there may be maladministration in terms of the general manager's contract and conditions of service and with regard to the substantial loss of 600 or 700 jobs. It is at least comforting to know that the commissioner has a role in investigating the trusts and that the trusts remain accountable, albeit in a more remote sense than some of us would like.

I have directed my remarks to the way in which the commissioner's role may develop. The commissioner has a role to play in Scotland. The local health councils in Scotland, which are equivalent to community health councils in England and Wales, have recently been reorganised. Those local health councils have been the subject of controversy because they have been significantly decreased in number and in terms of the number of people who serve on them. I am not alone in believing that their effectiveness will be reduced. Their ability to criticise health boards will certainly be reduced.

The Scottish Home and Health Department believes that the local health councils should not come within the remit of the Health Service Commissioner. It is said that they are not involved in the provision of health services. That is true, but they provide advice and assistance to patients and they are now closely linked to the health boards in Scotland. The health boards appoint the local health councils. Previously they were representative of local communities, but that is no longer the case. They will be much less likely to criticise the health boards because they are appointed by them.

The Scottish Home and Health Department and the Government cannot have it both ways. They have severely reduced the independence of the local health councils, which are now virtually adjuncts of the Scottish health boards. Therefore, they should be subject to the scrutiny of the Health Service Commissioner. They must submit annual work programmes and reports. They are accountable to the health boards and, in the same way as the health boards themselves are accountable to the commissioner, the local health councils should also be accountable.

The average man or woman in the street does not know enough about the role of the ombudsman. I must be honest: when I became a Member of this place I had only the vaguest notion of the ombudsman's role and how, if I had to, I could contact him to make a complaint. Debates like this help to raise the ombudsman's profile, although not as an individual—I am sure that Mr. Reid would not want that. However, his role must become more widely known. The more publicity we can get for that the better. Since Mr. Reid took over his post, he has publicised his role among Members of Parliament and that publicity must now be widened. It is incumbent on all Members of Parliament to use the ombudsman with regard to constituents' complaints and we must ensure that our constituents are aware of the services that are available. I

welcome my role on the Select Committee and I look forward to continuing and developing that role in the years to come.

8.14 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), I am a relatively new member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. I welcome this debate and the opportunity to consider our Committee's work. It is far from being the most famous Select Committee, although the ombudsman's role is becoming more widely recognised. However, the Committee does an enormous amount of important and useful work and it is gratifying that this debate recognises that fact.

I commend to the House the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner, Mr. Reid, and his team. His job demands a mixture of qualities—a combination of administrative speed and legal precision that is not always easy to achieve. It includes concern for people combined with scrupulous fairness and the ability to produce accurate, concise and, as the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said, readable conclusions. That is absolutely crucial for the people who have made the complaints. From my experience on the Committee so far, all those things are achieved and it is no mean feat to pull together all those qualities.

The relationship between Members of Parliament and their constituents is unique. In a sense, we are all ombudsmen. We deal with a vast majority of problems in our constituencies and we involve the ombudsman only when we believe that we cannot take the matter any further. That gives hon. Members an enormous degree of job satisfaction and in the main it serves our constituents well.

The ombudsman's role has now become accepted as part of our democratic framework. The ombudsman played a crucial role in issues of national importance such as the Barlow Clowes affair. However, at the same time, the ombudsman regularly deals with hundreds of smaller problems which, although smaller in a national context, are no less important to the people concerned.

In other countries the ombudsman plays a much larger role in the nation's affairs and some would argue that he should do so here. The Select Committee recently visited Scandinavia and saw at first hand the work of the ombudsmen there; they have a much more comprehensive brief and a freer hand in many ways. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central mentioned the sheer number of cases dealt with in Scandinavia as compared with the number of cases in this country.

Ombudsmen in Scandinavia are allowed to investigate more areas than our commissioners and they can initiate inquiries. That is something that we should consider here. In one of the countries that we visited, the ombudsman's office had a team whose job it was to scrutinise the papers daily to see whether there were issues that should be investigated. I am not sure whether that is the right approach, but perhaps we might at least consider giving our ombudsman a slightly freer hand.

I refer briefly to the question of people versus systems. The enormous value of the concept of the ombudsman is that it highlights the role and responsibility of the individual in the complex administrative frameworks that we have created to run our country's life. At the end of the day, people make systems work. Systems may help or they may hinder, depending on how well they are designed, but people run them and are responsible for them. Too much reliance on systems and managerial frameworks rather than on personal responsibility can be disastrous.

The other factor that bedevils any system, and which has become one of my pet hates over the years, is jargon. It seems that some committees can hold entire conversations using only initials or titles that are meaningless to anyone outside that close professional circle. May I make a plea for plain speaking and simple language that everyone can understand?

I suppose that "The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration" is rather a long title; perhaps, in comparison with the simple word ombudsman, it could even be termed jargon. Much dearer to my heart, however, is the word matron. Let me deal briefly with the matron, who comes within the ambit of the Health Service Commissioner. In days gone by, the title and role of matrons was clearly understood. With the 1960s and 1970s came changes in structures, job specifications and titles which I believe have not proved helpful in many cases. The position of matrons has become obscured. It is time to bring it back—not just back, but right into the foreground of nursing.

Some time ago, I tabled an early-day motion—which attracted more than 100 signatures—supporting that idea. Hon. Members may know that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) has also been campaigning to reintroduce the matron. Since then, I have talked to colleagues and constituents, all of whom seem to agree with me.

I am sure that the Chairman of our Select Committee will bear me out when I say that, time after time, we ask witnesses whether, had one person been solely responsible for nursing care, the problem would have arisen; and, more often than not, the answer is no. The role, responsibility and title of matron were clearly understood. She was the person who could talk to consultants and doctors; she understood the needs of patients; and, as a trained nurse herself, she could manage her nurses with efficiency and understanding. Every nursing unit should have a matron in charge, and "matron" must be her title.

Let me quote from one of the various notes that I have received from the Department of Health. Advising hospitals about how to run their affairs, it states:

"The professional head of nursing for the whole of the Unit may be called a Director of Nursing Services or a Matron".

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that "may" is not good enough, and that these titles are confusing. My hon. Friend smiles and I understand why: in many ways the topic is amusing. None the less, it goes to the heart of many of the problems that we encounter in the Select Committee, notably the understanding of roles and responsibilities on the part of those who are responsible and of those whom they are serving. I repeat my plea: let us have our matron back.

I have been in correspondence with various nursing organisations and I received a letter from the Sheffield and North Trent college of nursing and midwifery, which agrees entirely with what I am saying. The principal writes:

"It may be of interest to note that in Sheffield the designation Matron has been retained by the Northern General Hospital, one of the first wave of NHS Trusts and has been introduced into the Doncaster Royal Infirmary

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Montagu Hospital Trust. I would accept that the term has fallen into misuse over the years, but I do agree that it is readily understood by the public."

Again, let me plead with my hon. Friend the Minister. Let us not have the word "may"; let us press all our hospitals, and all organisations where nursing takes place, to reintroduce the matron and give her that title.

Having, I think, made that point as strongly as I can, I turn briefly to the entirely different question of court administration. Some time ago, on behalf of one of my constituents, I had cause to write to the Lord Chancellor about a case that had been brought to my attention. A man was contesting a divorce case. The solicitors on both sides and the client all agreed that a certain length of time would need to be taken by the court. Unfortunately, the court disagreed, saying that it would not need that much time, and a shorter period was allocated. In the event, the case needed the amount of time that the two solicitors had said that it would need and the two clients suffered both inconvenience and considerable financial loss as a result.

When I sought redress for my constituent, I encountered all sorts of problems from the Lord Chancellor's Department. I had great difficulty establishing exactly whose responsibility it was to decide such matters. Following a considerable amount of correspondence I have now heard from the Lord Chancellor's Department, which tells me that the allocation of time for cases is seen as a judicial decision and cannot be challenged in any way. What can be challenged is the administration of those decisions—in other words, the way in which witnesses are dealt with, messengers are sent and paperwork is handled.

In some ways, that is a step forward, but I am still unhappy that the allocation of time for cases cannot be challenged, even when so much inconvenience is involved. Moreover—although the Lord Chancellor's Department has made changes that took effect from 1 January this year—our ombudsman, who is allowed to look into the administrative side of court listings, still cannot examine the position of tribunal staff and their workings or investigate the Scottish courts.

Let me return to my opening remarks about the power and influence of our ombudsman and the question of widening his remit. Conservative Members would, I think, argue that the best way in which to run organisations that are not profit-oriented—such as the health service and the civil service—is to use the private enterprise system, or what we might sometimes describe as enlightened self-interest. Opposition Members may say that such organisations can be run efficiently by means of a system of brotherly or sisterly concern; but perhaps the best safeguard for the interests of the general public is a healthy respect for the powers and sphere of influence of a well-established and well-known ombudsman.

Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I much enjoy participating in the work of the Committee, which I consider very valuable. In my experience, all our witnesses—whoever they may be—are robustly questioned; and not just questioned, but sent away to bring back answers and, if need be, to effect changes in their sphere of responsibility. As I said earlier, I am delighted that we are holding this debate, which has recognised the valuable work that the commissioner does.

8.26 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): We have before us a great many papers, which are listed on the Order Paper. Each of the four reports would merit its own debate, rather than their being knocked together for consideration in a debate lasting less than half a day—and such debates happen all too rarely at that.

We also have before us reports prepared by the ombudsman in his various guises in different parts of the United Kingdom, and the responses to them; and Select Committee reports. Currently serving on the Select Committee are the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), the hon. Members for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), for Southport (Mr. Fearn), for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine), for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) and for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant). The previous members, since the start of the current Parliament, have been the hon. Members for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall), for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague).

All those people served as Members representing constituencies in Great Britain; not one was a Northern Ireland Member. They will understand—many are not simply political acquaintances, but personal friends of mine—that I am not criticising them when I say that they have been reared, and have lived both their parliamentary and their personal lives, in circumstances that are in many ways entirely different from ours, governed by entirely different administrative arrangements. Yet it is they who go to Northern Ireland to take evidence and to try to reach conclusions on what has been said.

No matter how worthy and hard-working Great Britain Members may be, I do not think that they really grasp the nuances of life in Northern Ireland, which means that, far too often, they do not ask the questions that we who represent the Province believe should be asked. We think that answers to those questions should be winkled out of the officials concerned, and even out of the ombudsman in his various guises, whether they like it or not. I would much have preferred to ask questions of an ombudsman who deals with affairs in Northern Ireland rather than to ask such questions of an ombudsman who also has to look after the affairs of the constituency of, for example, the hon. Member for Ashfield. I might not know very much about a mining community, but the hon. Gentleman would, and he would be better at asking such questions.

It is for that reason that I hope that the Government will look again at the question of establishing a Select Committee for Northern Ireland, which is vital and long overdue. In the absence of such a Committee, I hope that the Government will consider replacing Members from Great Britain—at least temporarily—with at least one Member from Northern Ireland whenever a Committee investigates matters relating to Northern Ireland. Frankly, the questions that need to be asked are not being asked, and we are not getting the answers we need. We will not do so without a Select Committee for Northern Ireland. At the very least, Members from Northern Ireland should serve on Committees that ask questions in or about the Province, or even of the Northern Ireland Office.

On page (iv) of the second report by the Select Committee for the Parliamentary Commissioner for

Administration for Northern Ireland, I particularly welcome the comment that the Committee intends to examine "in due course" the annual report of the ombudsman for Northern Ireland, which was published on 31 January this year. As it happens, the Committee was in Northern Ireland in January, looking at the previous reports. When the Committee examines the report which has been handed to us today, I hope that it will contain a Member from Northern Ireland who can ask the questions that need to be asked.

We read:

"more complaints were made about planning than any other matter",

but we then read that the number of planning complaints was "remarkably few." This is the first point on which hon. Members from Great Britain got it wrong. Nobody in Northern Ireland complains about a planning application that is granted. Rows arise about the small percentage of applications that are refused and in those cases where the fellow goes ahead with the development anyway. Such people often drive not only a team of four through the application, but half a dozen teams of four, and get away with it.

The sooner that that nonsense is stopped and we make such people take down the buildings that they have erected, often at great expense, and try by blackmailing the Government to allow them to stay, the better. That transgression of the planning laws will not stop until the transgressors are dealt with harshly. Heaven help the first, but there will be no more transgressors after that, because one has to take action only once or twice for folk to get the idea.

We also read that Dr. Hayes is intent on

"resolving cases, where possible, without a formal investigation."

I agree with that because, where there has been a slight misdemeanour, a quiet word will do more good than wielding the big stick. However, the commissioner in Northern Ireland sometimes seems to have been too willing to accept the assertions of officialdom instead of listening more carefully to the complainant.

In future, I hope that the complainant's word will be given considerably more weight and that, where there is a conflict of evidence or of understanding about what words actually mean, the person carrying out the investigation on behalf of the ombudsman's office will go back to check and, if necessary, will carry the matter forward into a formal investigation without any further ado. Officialdom sometimes gets away with things rather too easily.

I am also concerned about the long periods which sometimes elapse between start and end of an investigation. It is said that 11 months is now the average period for an investigation, but I can think of a few that have lasted rather longer and where I was still not all that happy about the conclusion. I hope that some effort will be made to deal with cases rather more speedily. Paragraph 9 refers to having "adequate legal advice". I hope that the ombudsman will try to get that, because the ombudsman's office in Northern Ireland needs good legal advice as soon as possible.

I am happy to note that the ombudsman will be able to spend rather more money in the future than has been the case in the past. Adequate resources are needed to carry out investigations into what are sometimes serious allegations.

I am concerned about the allegation in paragraph 15 that the ombudsman would like to be able to investigate a case that may be "just over the fence" from an investigation that he is carrying out. I am curious about the meaning of the phrase "just over the fence". I should have liked the ombudsman to set out his thinking rather more clearly and to know exactly what he was trying to say.

Was he saying that, if he is investigating a case and sees something associated with it but just beyond the scope of his current investigation, he cannot go into it unless there is a further complaint? If so, that would simply delay matters longer. I should like a clear explanation.

Paragraph 17 states:

"We recommended that the Government examine the possibility of establishing a separate Health Service Commissioner for Northern Ireland."

We then read:

"Nevertheless, the Department of Health and Social Services pointed out to him that his powers were, in some ways, wider than those of the Health Service Commissioners".

That may well be the case, but I suspect that the ombudsman's powers are very different from those of the Health Service Commissioners. I hope that the Select Committee will look into this again and adhere to its original recommendation that there should be a commissioner.

I could say a great deal more, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) will catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know that he has some complaints to make.

I should now like to draw the House's attention to the annual report for 1990. Two of the important cases to which it refers arose in my constituency and were brought to the commissioner's attention by me. Those two cases caused me some heartache. One relates to patent searches and to complaints about LEDU—the Local Enterprise Development Unit in Northern Ireland—and the ISD—the Industrial Science Laboratory in Northern Ireland. To some extent, the questions that were raised remain unanswered. I am exceedingly unhappy about these cases, and it is for that reason, as much as for any other, that I hope that, the next time round, an hon. Member from Northern Ireland will be present so that the right questions can be asked.

I am concerned about another case—No. PC 148/88, which relates to an individual who alleged that he had sustained an injustice as a result of maladministration by the Department of Agriculture in relation to the slaughter of cattle. The case led to considerable loss for my constituent. The account of it covers six pages of the report, from which one can see immediately that it was a fairly major, long-winded and detailed investigation. It ended with my constituent receiving a small amount of monetary compensation, but the amount fell far short of compensating him for the heartache and mental anguish that he has suffered since the allegation was made that he had administered illegal drugs to his cattle. In fact, he was one of the leading opponents in Northern Ireland of the administration of that drug. The fact that he was found not guilty of that practice in relation to his second group of cattle sent to the abattoir is some consolation to him, but not very much.

When one comes across cases such as the two that I have mentioned, one wonders where we should draw the line relating to the powers and responsibilities of the commissioner. We are now overdue in taking another

[Mr. William Ross]

long, hard look at the powers of the commissioner and at his investigative authority. We should try to sort out once and for all a system that is more effective than the present system, without going so far into legalities that we become involved in endless legal wrangles. That is a difficult line to assess but we need to take another look at it.

8.39 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I was interested in the final point made by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) about whether we should engage in ceaseless legal wrangling. I say that as a lawyer, and for this reason. When we are deciding whether people should have redress of grievance—fundamentally that is one of the most important aspects of the function of this House of Parliament—we should not be deprived of the opportunity to make complaints on behalf of our constituents simply because they fall on one side or other of a line that has been drawn as a matter of law. From reading the Committee's reports, it seems that the office of the ombudsman does a remarkably good job. However, even that office becomes a little precise in the way in which it adjudicates. I know that it does a good job and that it does its best. However, we should address ourselves to the intrinsic quality and efficacy of the case in question.

I have two cases in my constituency. One is that of a Mr. Gane. He has had what I regard as a thoroughly raw deal. He was court-martialled many years ago. He is a first-class constituent and a man for whom I have the greatest respect. He has persistently sought to have his case reviewed by the Ministry of Defence. I have had a series of replies from Ministers. There is a voluminous file of correspondence on the case. There are all sorts of reasons why Mr. Gane's case cannot be given the consideration that I feel that it deserves. At the bottom line, without going into all the details—they are all on file—Mr. Gane has had a raw deal. I should like to feel that this House and the officials who are responsible for examining cases such as his could give that bit of extra attention to it. I should like to feel that they would not simply go over the facts again and come up with much the same answer.

I look to the Minister and those who have influence with him to take yet another look at Mr. Gane's case. It is time that he obtained the discharge which he would like and which I would like on his behalf. One vote in a constituency will not make very much difference, but there are times when people come into one's surgery whom one knows have had a raw deal. I feel strongly that Mr. Gane deserves a little more justice.

The case of another of my constituents, Mr. Kent, is rather different. He is now a pensioner but was previously employed in east Africa. I have had a lot of correspondence with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) about the case. My constituent was employed before legislation was passed which would give him a larger pension than he receives now. The details of the case are well known to officials in the Foreign Office. Without going into all the details, let me say that Mr. Kent has not had a fair deal. There does not seem to be any reason why a pensioner who worked in colonial administration before certain Acts of Parliament were passed should not receive the justice which applies to civil servants now receiving pensions—sometimes, dare I say it, inflated pensions. My constituent, who in his own time did exactly the same job as those who receive larger pensions, is living in reduced circumstances simply because a line was drawn

The case of Mr. Kent reminds me of the old Court of Requests. People would go to someone like Sir Thomas More and say, "I have had a raw deal. There has been inequity. Do you not think that I should be given extra consideration? The line of the law has been drawn, but I have a case and I want redress of grievance." One would go to either the Court of Requests or Parliament. One would probably obtain justice. It was perhaps a little rough, but none the less one obtained it.

At the bottom of all the reports, the voluminous correspondence that underpins them and the good work that the office does—I make no complaint about that—I sometimes wonder whether the reasonableness that lies at the heart of justice is overlooked because we look at the minutiae of the law. In my correspondence with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North, the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, I have raised the case of Mr. Kent on several occasions. My hon. and learned Friend replied that, although he would have liked to help, unfortunately he could not because the law did not provide for him to do so. One then looks to the law and asks whether Parliament will pass a new Act. Parliament will not pass an Act to help Mr. Kent. I should like to think that it would, but it will not. So we should consider in the context of this annual report whether more discretion should be allowed in cases such as those I have mentioned. I have only two cases in my constituency which come to mind, but I suspect that there are many more in the United Kingdom where a little extra flexibility would help to produce the redress of grievance and justice that people deserve.

I have put the two cases from my constituency before the House. Officials in the relevant Departments know exactly what I am talking about. Each case deserves a debate in its own right. With regard to Mr. Kent, I was intrigued to see that under the heading "Foreign and Commonwealth Office" in appendix A the report says: "See under HO." I take that to mean the Home Office. I then looked at the appendix which deals with complaints. I have not the faintest idea whether the complaint that I have in mind appears in that convoluted appendix, but I do know that people such as my constituents deserve a little more attention than they have received.

I do not expect the Minister who is on duty this evening to deal in his reply with the cases that I have mentioned, but I do ask that those cases, which are well known to the relevant Departments, are properly investigated and that my constituents are given a fair deal.

8.47 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I have been a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration for four years. I have also been a local councillor for 22 years. During those years I have written many times to the local ombudsman. I always regarded the parliamentary ombudsman as rather a mysterious person in a mysterious office. When I became a member of the Select Committee, I found that we had a hard-working, hard-hitting Committee and certainly one which was exciting at times. It is so exciting that the television

cameras should come in some time. Not only one aspect or item but a variety of events is often dealt with, especially when the health service is being considered. Broadcasters would find it interesting.

I do not want the cameras to come into the Committee because we crave for television. I want the public to see what really goes on in the ombudsman's office. The present Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration is excellent and previous commissioners were also excellent. They give us good answers, which everyone deserves to know about. At times, radio has picked up one or two items and the public have been grateful. The public are only just becoming aware of the work of the ombudsman and are beginning to use their Member of Parliament in the right way.

There is still confusion between the functions of the local ombudsman and those of the parliamentary ombudsman. Perhaps the problem can be cleared up in the future. The extent to which the services are being used is indicated by the figures. There are about 1,000 cases on the books. Of those, perhaps 500 will be rejected. The numbers vary. At a meeting of the Select Committee I asked what happened to cases that had been rejected. After all, the people concerned make sane and sensible complaints. The Parliamentary Commissioner said that complaints were not rejected out of hand, but were passed to others who could provide advice and help. The citizens advice bureaux take on board items that have been rejected by the parliamentary ombudsman. The Members of Parliament involved get the same sort of service through other organisations.

One third of all complaints concern social security. As other hon. Members have said, the main social security complaints arise from misleading forms and leaflets. In that respect, I think that the parliamentary commissioner is beginning to get the position rectified. Ordinary people are now much better able to understand the leaflets. Other matters about which large numbers of complaints are received concern the Inland Revenue, the environment, transport, trade and industry, and employment. I was very surprised to see in the latest report a reference to a complaint about the National Rivers Authority. As the NRA is a very new body, the complainant and the Member of Parliament were rather quick off the mark. Complaints are also received about defence and data protection. Indeed, the whole range of parliamentary business is covered.

Public awareness has been increased. At the request of the Select Committee, the commissioner has issued 150,000 leaflets, many of which are now to be found in libraries and in the premises of citizens advice bureaux and other organisations. They will help to remove some of the confusion and the veil of secrecy that people perceive to hang over the ombudsman's office. When we visited Canada, we found that the public there were aware of the system. It was not a joy trip by any means; we covered 11,000 miles in seven days. Indeed, at one time we lost the Chairman. He was talking to a group of people about the work of the ombudsman and missed the plane. However, he caught up at the next stop. The Canadian system is efficient. But, of course, so is ours. I missed the trip to Scandinavia—if one may call it a trip—but I understand that the same sort of efficiency is to be found there. Indeed, efficiency is to be found throughout the world. As ombudsmen meet internationally, albeit not on a formal basis, we may see such systems develop throughout the world. It seems to me that there will soon be a Euro-ombudsman.

The Select Committee was aware of the efficiency of the office in respect of the Barlow Clowes case. Practically every Member of Parliament received letters about that affair. I received 27 complaints. The matter was resolved very satisfactorily. We are very grateful for the work that the commissioner's office did. Of the money that was lost, 90 per cent. has been paid back.

Health service complaints constitute one of the most interesting aspects of the commissioner's work. They cover a variety of items, including the procedures for the discharge of elderly people from hospital. The Committee heard from people about health authorities whose procedures were very wrong. In some instances, relatives brought complaints rather timidly but had their cases upheld. I am thinking, for instance, of situations in which people died within a few days of their discharge from hospital. Then there is the recording of falls or of untoward incidents. I recall the terrible case of a lady amputee being left to go to the toilet alone, falling off the toilet, and lying for quite some time before being found. That was one of many cases. Another matter that comes to our attention is the training of staff in the handling of bereavement. It is vital that hospital staff be given proper training. The matter has been highlighted by the office and by the Select Committee. Then there is the question of setting up local complaints procedures. We have community health councils and other bodies, but local complaints procedures need to be examined very closely.

One case that comes to mind concerns a mentally disturbed hospital patient whose money was used to buy seven pairs of trousers. We thought that that was amazing. An investigation revealed that the money had simply been used very carelessly. Clearly, the person concerned did not need seven pairs of trousers. One of the most important facts to have emerged during my four years on the Committee is that various hospitals hold £67·7 million of patients' money. The money is held in the patients' names, and relatives have the right to decide what should happen to it. Many of those patients are incapable of going out into the community, and the money should be—and is—used for their benefit. The Southport and Formby health authority does excellent work. A young man in Greaves Hall hospital was very keen on Elvis Presley—so keen, indeed, that it was his life. His money was used to send him to an Elvis convention in America, and he has never stopped thinking and talking about it. In my opinion, that was a good use of his money. The enormous sum of money that I have mentioned—£67·7 million—must be closely guarded. This is a matter that should come within the scope of the parliamentary commissioner.

There is still confusion about the titles of hospital staff—ward sisters, ward managers and matrons. Administrative posts, too, seem to vary from one place to another, even though the people concerned do the same jobs. Committee witnesses, as well as Committee members, seemed to be confused about the grading system. Perhaps pressure from the Committee and the commissioner will result in this problem being cleared up.

The loss of records is another serious problem that keeps cropping up. I believe that the system is being tightened, but there have been instances of junior doctors—they were and still are extremely overworked—taking home work. Once some records were found in a junior

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doctor's car boot. Some such doctors have given up, and records have disappeared with them as they disappeared from the service. It is a great problem for hospitals, patients and their relatives to follow through those records. The parliamentary commissioner and the Select Committee now have their fingers on the pulse of that problem, and they will not let go.

I asked the commissioner whether prisoners had the right to use the ombudsman's office, and found out that they have as much right as anybody else. They do not use their right frequently, but there have been complaints from within the prison service that have been upheld. I was pleased to see that in the report for 1990.

All the items that I have described have come before us through the parliamentary commissioner and his excellent staff. We do our best in the Select Committee, and enjoy doing so. We have an excellent Chairman, too, but I would also like to thank the parliamentary commissioner and the workers in his office for all that they do. Until this debate their work was unsung.

9 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): It is a great pleasure to talk about the office of the parliamentary commissioner. Like its Chairman, the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), who is not in the Chamber, I have served on the Select Committee for some time. The trick is to know exactly what is going on.

It has been interesting over the years to observe the different parliamentary commissioners who have served the Select Committees and the House. Every one of them has been first class. They have all done a marvellous job. But one group has not yet been mentioned so I shall mention it now. The Select Committee could not manage without the Committee Clerks, who serve us in preparing reports and in providing information of all sorts. We have had different Clerks over the years, and they have all served us well.

Even if the general public do not know about the parliamentary commissioner, Government Departments do, and in no uncertain terms. Some of them have come in for a bit of rough treatment for the way in which they have served the community or individuals. Furthermore, people have been seconded from various Departments into the parliamentary commissioner's office. I wondered about that idea, and have questioned it from time to time, but at least it means that those who are seconded for a period and then return to their Departments can let those Departments know exactly where they stand with the parliamentary commissioner's office. The Departments are told that they must be on their toes and look over their shoulders because the parliamentary commissioner is watching them.

Another idea that worried me was that a Department such as the Treasury could have someone in the parliamentary commissioner's office. I thought, "Hello, hello. We have a spy in the camp." Someone who had been seconded could be tipping off his Department about what was going on. It works both ways. I have been a little worried about the secondment of people into the office, but in practice it works quite well. We have sometimes been to the parliamentary commissioner's office to talk to staff. That is how I found out about secondment—a chappie was introduced to me as having come from the Treasury. I was a little worried, but I have overcome that problem now. The parliamentary commissioner has set my mind at rest.

As I said, the Clerks do a first-class job and the Committee could not work without them. The service that they provide for every member of the Committee helps us to know exactly what is going on.

I do not know for how long we banged on the door of the Administration to debate the issue of the parliamentary commissioner on the Floor of the House. At long last we are having that debate, which gives us an opportunity to publicise, through the cameras, the wonderful work of the parliamentary commissioner's department. As members of the Select Committee, we get to know all that department's business and the parliamentary commissioner feeds us well—there is no doubt about that.

Naturally, the parliamentary commissioner sometimes has to come to us and say, "I think you had better call this lot in and give them a going over". By God, that has been done many a time. Tory Members come into the Committee Room and get a rough ride. They should not be there, but come because they have stepped out of line and things have gone wrong.

I remember sitting in a dark corner of the Chamber when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was at the Dispatch Box at Question Time. My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn)—he is in another party, but we are all friends on the Committee—was present, and the questions to the Secretary of State were on Barlow Clowes. The Secretary of State wanted to know nothing about the matter, despite the fact that many people were taken for a ride. Two of my constituents were ex-miners who had taken redundancy settlements of £20,000 and £25,000. They had sunk every penny into Barlow Clowes and all their money went to Gibraltar. We may have problems here, but Gibraltar was even worse. The Secretary of State did not want to know, but the matter was referred to the parliamentary commissioner, which was the best move that has ever been made in this place. He sorted the job out and the Government had to change their minds. The Tory Administration and Secretary of State in office at that time—everyone knows who he is because he has just put his house on the market for £1 million—did not want to know but the parliamentary commissioner did his job and those people were paid. That clearly shows the importance of the office of the parliamentary commissioner, which does a first-class job. I must be a little careful because the matter is sub judice—the person responsible has yet to go to court and the inquiry is going on—so I shall say no more.

For Members with constituents involved in that business it was a nightmare, so it must have been a nightmare for the parliamentary commissioner and the wonderful staff who serve under him. We have been talking about the parliamentary commissioner, but we must not forget his deputies and his whole team who have done a first-class job. From time to time, we have been across to look at their department.

The hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) mentioned the courts. That issue bothered us. We realised that we had a problem because we were being denied the opportunity to ask the parliamentary commissioner to take action. So what did we do? We summoned the Lord

Chancellor to our Committee. At first he said, "I ain't coming"—he was an awkward beggar—but in the end he had to come.

I remember when the Lord Chancellor marched into the Committee Room. Before he came in, however, we had a little private discussion and the Chairman said to all of us, "Be careful what you say and what you ask. For God's sake don't upset him or we will not get anything." The Lord Chancellor came in with an army of officials. He sat down and spoke for 15 minutes and told us, straightforwardly, that we were not going to get what we were looking for. I then indicated to the Chairman that I wanted to say something. He did not like calling me because he knew that I was seething. I told the Lord Chancellor that I felt that I had been shot down by Dillinger—the House will remember Dillinger, that big American gangster.

When that Lord Chancellor was changed, the new one moved in the right direction. He allowed us to study the administration of the courts. Some bad things were going on and there had been some slip-ups as well as massive administrative delays. The parliamentary commissioner can now study all that, which is a step in the right direction.

I believe that the parliamentary commissioner needs to be given more teeth. I have always said so. He needs that extra power to take the right action because at present he only recommends—he does not make any decision. He should be able to make decisions, never mind recommendations.

One of the Health Ministers is here tonight. What about all the problems in the blooming health service? We are not getting what we should be having because the health service is not getting the proper resources—I shall prove that later. The Minister is pulling on his ear and making out that he is reading, but I hope that he is listening to all the problems that we have in the NHS.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport mentioned a number of cases that the Committee and the Health Service Commissioner considered. The House should understand that that person wears two hats—he is the parliamentary commissioner and the Health Service Commissioner. He does a first-class job of both and he gets on with it. There is no doubt about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Southport referred to an elderly lady with one limb who sat on a commode and fell off the damn thing because no one was there to look after her. That was shocking.

The Committee has summoned various health authorities and has given them a real going over to put the wrongs right. Often they have put things right before they appear in the Committee because the people who made the mistakes have moved on. The new people have to deal with the problem and put it right. Sometimes, however, we get the people who made the mistakes. Then the Committee shows no mercy, it just gets stuck in and tells them quite clearly where they went wrong. We have also made it clear that some penalty should be imposed because of the serious mistakes that have been made from time to time.

Sir Antony Buck: The hon. Gentleman's impact on the Committee is considerable, as is his impact on the senior civil servants who come before us. The Committee values the wonderful work that he does with us. I should, however, correct one thing that he said. Lord Hailsham was keen to come before the Committee—it did not take any dragging from the Woolsack to get him to the witness stand. In fact, Lord Hailsham volunteered to appear before the Committee. The Committee was literally after his staff, but, in fairness to Lord Hailsham, he insisted on coming to be subjected to strenuous cross-examination from the hon. Member and me, too.

Mr. Haynes: It took the Chairman of the Select Committee a bit of time to think about that. I mentioned it ages ago. I accept what he says. However, I am putting my point of view and how I felt about it at the time. The Lord Chancellor's comments blooming well upset me. I am not used to being talked to like that and I did not like it at all, so he had it coming to him and he got it. I had the final word, anyway. The result was that we did not get from him what we were looking for. We had to wait for the present Lord Chancellor, who is a real gentleman. We got what we were looking for from him, but we need to go even further as time goes on and I am sure that we will.

We have had the district or regional health authorities in on many occasions when there have been serious problems. I remember one occasion when a sister in a geriatric hospital was covering a number of wards throughout the night. Patients of that age need to be turned, but they were short of staff. We come back to resources again—to provide adequate staff to do the job properly. We should look into that. It amounts to maladministration if the right resources and number of bodies are not provided to give a proper service.

I remember well hearing about a geriatric lady who, having seen the consultant, was stuck in a wheelchair in the corridor all flipping day. She was incontinent and freezing cold and was not given a cup of tea or a bite to eat. Everybody walked past her in the corridor. The poor old dear was left there. That was one complaint that we heard about, but there are many similar complaints about the national health service. When those complaints are brought to our attention, it is our job to ask the parliamentary commissioner to look into them and do something about them. He should have more teeth. I hope that we shall soon be in a position to give him more teeth so that he can really get stuck into the job. I shall be right behind him.

9.16 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). He is one of the few Members who can communicate with his constituents from the Palace of Westminster without the medium of the telephone. It is also a great pleasure to be able to take part in the debate, although I am not a member for the Select Committee, for reasons that I shall explain.

I take particular comfort from the words used by the ombudsman when he refers to his health service functions. They are to be found in paragraph 57 of his annual report. No one else, I believe, has referred to them, so it is important to put them on the record. In paragraph 57 he says:

> "By highlighting some of the problems which can arise, my purpose is to promote a better service for future patients who look to the NHS for health care."

I think that we all agree with that. Tonight we are interested in whether the ombudsman has sufficient

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resources and in whether his role is defined in the right way to permit him to carry out the mission that he has picked out.

All hon. Members who are here tonight do not, I believe, consider that the ombudsman has a wide enough role. He cannot look at NHS problems quickly enough to enable him to carry out his purpose, according to the words that I have just read. At the moment, he is a sort of grumbling appendix for the national health service. A patient, a Member of Parliament, a relative and, in some sad cases, the next of kin takes up a complaint about the administration of health care. Sometimes that complaint goes via the community health council. That is one of the advised ways of taking up a complaint. The community health council then takes up the complaint with the health authority. If the health authority rejects the complaint, or fails to answer, the Member of Parliament takes it up with the ombudsman—or the patient takes it up direct with the ombudsman. He then looks into the complaint and may make a recommendation. If the ombudsman thinks it is a really serious complaint, he brings it to the attention of the Committee chaired by the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck). If the Committee thinks that it is important, it will write it up in the annual report. A month later the House debates it. That whole process may take up to two years. During that period somewhere in the NHS someone has probably managed to get a cataract operation or even a hip replacement. It is a slow and tortuous process. It is shutting the stable door long after Shergar is in the next county or even in the next world.

We are reviewing the role of the ombudsman to find out what else he might need to do in future compared to the service—excellent though it is—that he has provided in the past. Can we speed up the process? If so, how can we do it? Should the ombudsman be able to adopt a fast-track approach in certain cases if he thinks that he should step in immediately rather than deal with the matter retrospectively? Should he have a challenge role whereby he can write to the health authority straight away? The ombudsman may comment not on the clinical aspects of treatment but on administrative aspects. He may suspect maladministration which he wants to investigate immediately. At the moment he cannot do that; all he can do is to take retrospective action.

The ombudsman has to steer a narrow channel. He may not look into clinical matters or resources and strategy. If a patient cannot get treatment in a hospital because it has closed, provided the closure was carried out properly, with authority from the Secretary of State for Health or from his territorial opposite number in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, the ombudsman cannot challenge that. If the hospital has been closed properly, that is not maladministration.

If a patient cannot get treatment within the specified period and dies as a result, that is not maladministration either. That is a clinical matter which can be taken up by the person's next of kin who may seek compensation because the patient was neglected.

What is maladministration? I want to give an example of what I consider to be maladministration, which I have drawn to the attention of the ombudsman in Wales today. It is an illustrative example of what I think that the ombudsman should be able to do by a fast-track, challenge method.

The children's ward in Rhydlafar orthopaedic hospital, Cardiff, the main orthopaedic hospital serving south Wales, is being closed. The procedure is being carried out properly. There is no challenge to that. The Minister's opposite number in Wales has authorised the closure and the reason for closure was explained last October. The authorisation was delayed because of the Gulf war. Permission has now been given by the Secretary of State and the ward is to be closed. The last admissions were yesterday and probably all the patients will be out by Friday. Is that maladministration?

When the in-patients were told that the hospital was to close, the consultant in whose care they were was not there. Let me explain the dates. The date on which the closure was announced to the patients still there was 11 April. The hospital administrator told the parents of the children in the ward that the last admissions would be on 30 April and that all the children were to be out by 3 May.

The consultant in whose care they are is on holiday for a fortnight and nine days of his holiday remain. He is a constituent of mine, Mr. John Hombal. As he was at home, the health authority tried to get hold of him that Friday but did not manage to do so. The hospital administrator had to ask the parents of the children who were continuing their in-patient treatment whether they would prefer their children to transfer to a children's ward at the Cardiff Royal infirmary or to an adult ward at the same hospital—the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital.

One of the patients is a nine-old child who would have to be transferred to a ward of women patients whose average age is 75. Another is a boy who had an accident and had to be readmitted to hospital as the pins in his legs had to be re-set. He would have to spend quite some time in hospital in a ward full of old men. The consultant has gone to Spain on holiday. He has every right to do that, but he is not due to return for another week. When he returns he will advise the patients to transfer to an adult ward in the same hospital and not to the children's ward at another hospital.

Is it maladministration to give parents the choice of whether their children should switch to another hospital in order to remain in a children's ward—it is sound paediatric practice that children should always be in hospital with other children—or to transfer to the adult ward in the same hospital for the sake of the continuity of nursing care when there is no doctor around on whom they can rely for medical advice?

The parents told me that they felt completely at sea. They said, "How were we supposed to make such a choice when our doctor is not around to be consulted?". The children are not in the care of the hospital administrator; they are in the care of the consultant, Mr. Hombal, but the hospital administrator said to parents, "Here is your choice. Tell me by next week, if you possibly can"; and needs a decision before the consultant comes back.

It seemed to me, and the ombudsman has confirmed it prima facie, that that is a possible definition of maladministration. It certainly worries me. What worries me more is the fact that if the ombudsman were in a position to step in he might say that, had the consultant been around, he would have explained to the health authority that he recommended clinically that the children should not be transferred out of the hospital because he

wanted to continue their care in the same hospital even if the children's ward were closed and they had to transfer to an adult ward. Although it is not good practice that they should be in an adult ward, at least they will have the same nurses who know about the long-drawn-out process of leg lengthening.

When the consultant returned, he explained to me why he had recommended that the children should remain in the same hospital. He said, "Clinically, I would never advise that a child who is having leg lengthening gets one leg lengthened in one hospital and then transfers to another hospital to have the other leg lengthened." I cannot imagine anything worse than having one leg lengthened by three inches and the other by two inches as a result of changing from anaesthetists and nurses who were experienced in that procedure to those who were less experienced.

That is an illustration of what I would consider a good reason for the evolution of the role of the ombudsman into a challenge role whereby the ombudsman could say to the health authority, on a fast-track basis, "You had better stop what you are doing until we have had a chance to look at it, because it appears that you have broken the rules of medical ethics and procedure."

Consultants whom I have told about that case in which parents have to make a difficult choice without being able to consult a doctor tell me that it breaks all the rules of sound medical practice. It is not a matter that can be taken to the General Medical Council as a case of medical negligence because no doctor is involved. But that is precisely the point. No doctor is involved because the hospital administrator, through no fault of her own, was put in the impossible position of asking medical questions when the patients are not in her care but in the doctor's care, and the doctor happens to be away on holiday.

What on earth are we supposed to do? There is a role for the Member of Parliament and there is a role for the ombudsman, which I should like to think might not always be as retrospective as it is today. There is also the usual process of ringing up the chairman of the health authority and asking him what he is doing about the matter. I have done that, and it is quite clear that the chairman of the health authority was not even told by the unit general manager that the consultant was away on holiday so that the parents could not consult him before having to decide to which hospital their children should be transferred when the ward is closed halfway through their in-patient treatment. How are they supposed to operate when the chairman of that authority did not know that the decision was being pressed on to the parents while the consultant was away on a well-deserved holiday? In trying to steer a channel between being able to consider strategy and resource decisions, which are properly the province of the Minister; the execution of the decisions, which is properly the province of the health authority; and clinical decisions, which were not involved in this case because there was no doctor present, the ombudsman has a restricted and retrospective role.

If we are to move to a system similar to that of the Danes or the Swedes, the ombudsman must be able to challenge decisions halfway through their execution. He could bring enormous benefits to administration of the health service by acting as a check against abuses and the steamrollering of decisions while doctors are away. The ombudsman's role must be permitted to evolve to answer the new requirements of the more commercial health service. Unfortunately, we are moving towards a more market-oriented system, and we shall need a stronger ombudsman if more patients are not to suffer.

I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having the opportunity to put my strong feelings on the record. I shall wait to see what the health commissioner in Wales makes of this case.

9.30 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I am glad that the subject for debate includes the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, particularly as I raised the issue during business questions last Thursday. Although it does not appear on the Order Paper, I hope that the debate also covers the Northern Ireland commissioner for complaints. I have his report here. The same person holds both posts and produces one report.

In recent years, complaints to the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration have followed a familiar pattern. Most of them relate to town and country planning issues and welfare benefits. In 1990, there were 35 complaints on each subject, out of a total of 164. To that total we should add the five complaints about the Northern Ireland Office and the court service that were made to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration for Great Britain.

I hope that the paucity of complaints about the Northern Ireland Office is not taken as suggesting that there is satisfaction with its work. It probably reflects ignorance of the fact that complaints about that Department go to the British commissioner. I hope that something can be done about that.

I should like to draw attention to the almost total absence of complaints to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration about alleged political or religious discrimination. That is significant, in view of the allegations that are regularly made about the administration of Northern Ireland. It is not something new, since it has also occurred in previous dispensations.

The spread of complaints to the commissioner for complaints is interesting. In 1990, out of 331 complaints, only 45 were against local bodies, mainly local authority bodies. Thirty-nine were against education boards, 82 were against health boards, and 114 were against the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The pattern is not new. In recent years, more complaints have been made against the Northern Ireland Housing Executive than any other local body. If the number of complaints reflects consumer satisfaction, the Housing Executive has no grounds for complacency.

In view of the perception common in some places that there is something wrong or unusual about local democracy in Ulster—such as it is—there are comparatively few complaints against local authorities. Of those, only two were upheld. One related to delays in completing a compulsory purchase. The commissioner for complaints said that the local authority

"displayed a clear lack of strategic thinking and this deficiency led to a lamentable failure to get grips with the question of acquiring the complainants' land. I recognise the difficulties faced by the Council in terms of changing government attitude to grant-aid, the counter-proposals it received from the complainants and delays engendered by the public inquiry . . . Nevertheless, I am convinced that the development of a

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clear strategy at the outset and less faith in its policy of acquisition by agreement would have resulted in a much more businesslike resolution".

I do not complain about the result in that case, but of what local authority in England could not something similar be said?

The commissioner for complaints heard an allegation of discrimination on religious grounds about the failure of a person to be appointed to the post of principal at a nursery school. I am happy to say that, after a painstaking inquiry, in which the commissioner took evidence on oath from the parties—the case is notable for that precedent—the allegation was disproved. I am especially delighted that the commissioner heard that case, because appointments in schools are not fully covered by the fair employment legislation. Indeed, the unequal application of that legislation, and the privilege given to certain sectors in education to discriminate, is much resented in Ulster.

It is time to reconsider the range of remedies that are available to aggrieved citizens—not only the ombudsmen but the role of judicial review. That is especially pressing because judicial review has been extended in recent years.

I had a case in my constituency a few months ago, the subject of which is not important, on which the Department made an unsatisfactory decision. The Department appeared to have moved the goalposts, so I raised the case with it. Correspondence was exchanged, but not much progress was made. In the back of my mind was the possibility of referring the matter to the parliamentary commissioner, but my aggrieved constituent decided on a faster way of dealing with the matter, by making an application for judicial review.

I wished her luck with the proceedings and hoped that the financial risks would not be too high. A mere three weeks later, she came into my constituency office and happily reported that, shortly after proceedings were commenced, the Department threw in the towel and settled. It agreed not only to reopen the case but to procedures to deal with it. I had been trying for a long time to get the Department to agree such a course.

Hon. Members have not fully appreciated the way in which judicial review has changed such cases. It has one enormous advantage—any aggrieved person can apply. Whatever the original reason for a parliamentary filter on applications to the ombudsman, is there any point in retaining that obstacle, especially as it does not apply to the Northern Ireland commissioner for complaints, which does not seem to have caused a problem?

Judicial review has the advantage of access, but its disadvantage is that it has no power to award damages. The ombudsman has no power, but compensation is often paid by settlement. That is not good enough, because compensation by settlement rests on the grace and favour of the Department. It is unacceptable that a citizen who has been proved right should have to go as a supplicant to the Department that has been proved wrong. Sometimes payments are not made.

An example of that appears in paragraph 23 of the second report of the Select Committee. The problem arose from the construction of a police station. The commissioner concluded—the Select Committee agreed with him—that it was unfair that the complainant's home should be seriously devalued by the fortress that surrounded it, and that she lived in constant fear of terrorist attack. The Select Committee recommended that the Department should reconsider the legal position. I sought to move an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill that would have dealt with the matter. I am glad to have the somewhat belated support of the Select Committee. I hope that the Government will take the opportunity in another place to resolve the matter.

The solution to the problem of monetary compensation is to give a right to damages, for which there is a precedent. The Northern Ireland commissioner for complaints made findings that enabled the parties' damages to be assessed by the courts. That is unique to the Northern Ireland commissioner. The parliamentary commissioner for complaints does not have the same power to make a finding that can be followed up in the courts and damages assessed.

I am well aware of that procedure because, in one of the first major cases in Northern Ireland, a number of my colleagues in the local authority had to bear heavy financial bills. I shall not go into the details of the case, but they felt somewhat aggrieved—with reason—and thought that it had been unfair. They suffered from what was until then a novel and little-known procedure. It may now be a little better known in Northern Ireland, but should it be confined there?

Why should public bodies and some councillors have to carry a potential penalty that is not applied to people elsewhere in Great Britain? It should apply generally; there is nothing unique about the cases that arise in Northern Ireland and to which the procedure applies. Having read the report of the parliamentary commissioner for complaints, who can say that similar cases do not arise on this side of the water? On matters concerning the rights and remedies of the citizen, there should be no discrimination between one part of the kingdom and another.

I hope that, in the general review of grievance procedures which I have suggested, the rights of the citizens in Great Britain will at least achieve the level of those in Ulster. In addition, I hope that the remedies of all will be significantly enhanced.

We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I hope that debates on this subject will be more frequent, especially as long as we who represent Northern Ireland constituencies continue to be under-represented on Select Committees.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I begin by echoing the comments by hon. Members of all parties in thanking those who currently fill the offices of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Health Service—Mr. Reid—and Mrs. McIvor, who combines the office of the Northern Ireland PCA with that of the Commissioner for Complaints. Tributes have been paid to their hard work and to the effectiveness of that work.

I also join the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) in taking the opportunity to pay tribute to the previous holders of those offices who established a high standard of work, which the current holders undoubtedly continue. The standing of the various ombudsman posts has undoubtedly been enhanced by the people who have

previously occupied them. In his typically generous fashion, the hon. Gentleman wished to extend thanks to the people filling the offices of Clerk to the Select Committee.

Listening to the hon. Member for Ashfield talking about his work on the Select Committee, I began to wonder what he was like as a Committee man. The House is familiar with his style and delivery in the Chamber——

Sir Antony Buck: Forceful.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. and learned Friend describes the hon. Gentleman as forceful, which is no surprise. The debate has centred on essentially administrative and relatively important but low-key issues, but the hon. Gentleman nevertheless managed to make the populist speech that we have come to expect from him. He is a one-man argument for delaying the general election so that we shall continue to have the pleasure of his presence in the House. He will forgive me if I observe that Dillinger was before my time. I have learnt something—indeed, quite a lot—this evening, not least from the hon. Gentleman's reference to Dillinger.

I begin my more serious comments by picking up on the speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) who rightly stressed that the importance of the ombudsman process is its function of ensuring that democracy not only works but is seen to work and that the citizen has an effective right of redress if the various organs of the state do not fulfil efficiently and effectively the task for which they have been established. I shall deal with my functions in a moment. My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right that if the state is not seen to be effective and if there is not adequate machinery for redress if it is not effective, democracy gets a bad name and that is enough to put the concept itself under threat. I entirely agree with him. That establishes the importance of the work carried out by the ombudsman. There can be few more important responsibilities of this House than to ensure that democracy works effectively and that we are seen to be accountable to the people who elected us to this place.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North was right to stress the importance of the accountability of the ombudsman to Parliament. The principle upon which our constitution is built is that civil servants are responsible to Ministers and Ministers are responsible to this House for everything that goes on in their Departments. No Minister should ever wish to avoid that responsibility. The accountability of Health Ministers for what happens in the health service, including the trusts, and the accountability of other Ministers for what happens in their Departments is to the House. It is the task of every hon. Member to try to enforce that accountability. That is why my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North was right to describe the ombudsman as a bolt in the armoury of an hon. Member. The ombudsman is one of the machineries that enhance the effectiveness of individual Members in calling the bureaucracy to account.

Several hon. Members argued that the role of the ombudsman should be enhanced possibly by providing direct access to the parliamentary ombudsman. Indeed, one hon. Member argued that the ombudsman should be allowed to initiate inquiries on his own authority and to pursue a particular line of inquiry within the bureaucracy. Before we go down that route, we should remember that the accountability of Ministers is to the House and that the essence of the ombudsman is to enhance the effectiveness of hon. Members in calling the bureaucracy to account through the House. That is the way in which our constitution works.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) tried to draw parallels with the system operating in some Scandinavian countries. They must remember the different constitutional histories of those countries and the importance that we have historically always placed on maintaining the principle that bureaucracy is accountable through Ministers to Parliament and that Ministers can answer questions at the Dispatch Box about what happens within their Departments.

The ombudsman was established as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. His principal concern is to ensure that the public service delivers to the citizen a quality of service which the citizen is entitled to expect. Public administration is, if we like, his core business.

Mr. Morgan: That is trust language.

Mr. Dorrell: I make no apology for asking of any organisation what is its core responsibility or business. The ombudsman's core concern is the efficiency of public administration.

With regard to the health service, the ombudsman is not properly interested in clinical judgment. One of the first things that I learnt when I arrived at the Department of Health was the entirely proper importance attached throughout the health service to ensuring that administrators do not interfere with clinical freedom. That applies just as much to the ombudsman as to Ministers and administrators within the health service.

However, that is not an excuse to allow people to hide behind clinical responsibility where that is specious. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North were concerned that clinical freedom should not be used as a defence when that is not a real or effective defence. However, where there are genuine clinical questions, those are not properly matters into which the ombudsman should inquire. It is particularly important to emphasise that merely to establish that they are clinical questions does not make them immune from review. There is a procedure within the national health service to review clinical questions, but that is properly a procedure that has been agreed with the professions and that takes account of the special nature of clinical questions. It is important to establish the difference between administrative and clinical questions, and to insist that clinical questions go through a proper process of clinical review and that we do not seek to confuse them in the ombudsman's operations.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said that she thought that surprisingly few complaints were addressed to the Health Service Commissioner about the operation of the NHS. She advanced three possible explanations. Perhaps there was not a "culture of complaint" in the health service; perhaps there was not adequate knowledge of the procedures for complaint—although the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central pointed out that the leaflet issued last summer, in the teeth of

[Mr. Dorrell]

considerable opposition from Labour Members, contained a passage setting out the procedures to be followed by any individual wishing to make a complaint. The hon. Lady's third explanation was that the citizen might not know the cause of the inadequacy in health service care from which he felt that he had suffered.

I was struck by the fact that the hon. Lady did not appear to entertain the possibility that the explanation might just be that the health service, in the vast majority of cases, provided a very high standard of care of which we should all be proud, and for which we should all be grateful.

The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) referred to the passage in the report that deals with discharge arrangements. It is indeed important to ensure that such arrangements are effective and that proper community support is given to those who are discharged from acute hospitals and who must then rely on community health services. That is part of the effective management and use of resources within the health service.

When the hon. Lady quoted from paragraph 18 of the report she quoted only the first half of the sentence, if memory serves. The passage that she quoted states, rightly:

> "Pressure on beds means that hospital doctors do not usually want to keep patients in hospital longer than is really necessary".

The sentence goes on:

> "And, in general, patients who have adequate facilities and support—whether professional or from carers—are eager to return home."

There are two quite proper pressures for a patient to be discharged as soon as that is clinically right. The first is the need—for the effective use of resources—for acute bed space not to be taken up by those who no longer need those resources. Secondly, and much more important, medicine is about encouraging people to return to the community and supporting them there rather than encouraging them to withdraw from it. I make no apology for the existence of management pressure, which is there for proper financial reasons—to ensure that resources are used effectively—and also so that patients are not kept in hospital any longer than is strictly necessary.

The hon. Lady mentioned no-fault compensation. That is an important issue. For some time, the Opposition have agreed that the proper way in which to finance the health service is to do so within a cash-limited total resource. It is recognised that a free, publicly funded health service necessarily has limited resources: there is no longer any dispute about that.

As of last weekend, there also seems to be no dispute about the prospects of an immediate substantial increase in the resources available to the health service. The Leader of the Opposition made it clear that he foresaw no such increase, except in the context of a growing economy.

When the hon. Member for Peckham argues for no-fault compensation, she must explain from where the resources that are to finance that no-fault compensation are to be diverted. That is a relatively urgent issue because this evening she argued the case for extending the principle of no-fault compensation to making payments to those people who are suffering HIV infections largely as a result of blood transfusions. I understand the human argument for that, but the House must remember that when a considerable amount of money was provided earlier this year for haemophiliacs who suffered the HIV infection as a result of treatment received from the health service, hon. Members of all parties told us that that was a special case because of the double jeopardy suffered by haemophiliacs who need to attend hospital for basic care simply to remain alive. It was argued that that special case should not become a precedent for the same principle to be applied to other groups.

Ms. Harman *rose*——

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment because I exempt her from this charge. She has been entirely consistent and has argued throughout that there should be no-fault compensation. However, the majority of hon. Members and of people outside the House who have pressed this case have said that haemophiliacs should be a special case because of double jeopardy and should therefore be provided with the cash without it being regarded as a precedent. The hon. Lady has been consistent and has argued that both the haemophiliacs and the group that we are now talking about should receive cash on a no-fault compensation basis.

However, that makes the question even more difficult for the hon. Lady because the further we go down the road of no-fault compensation, especially involving such large sums of money for each patient, the more she must explain, against the background of the pledge that was given by the leader of her party last Sunday—that there was no extra money for the health service—from where in the existing pattern of care in the health service the resources would come to pay for the pledge that she has given this evening.

Ms. Harman: It is for the Minister, who represents the Government, to explain why the Government are failing to provide compensation. We have always argued that the ex-gratia compensation paid to the haemophiliacs who became infected with HIV through blood transfusions should be available for all those who got HIV through blood transfusions. It was the Government who sought to say, "Let us separate off the haemophiliacs. Let us compensate them, but leave the others without hope."

Mr. Dorrell: I said that I exempted the hon. Lady from the charge, but she must still explain where the resources will come from.

Hon. Members of all parties, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West and for Suffolk, Central, have commented on the importance of plain English. My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central was anxious that the word "matron" should reappear in the health service's management charts. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West was concerned to ensure that the leaflets that are issued by the health service and by Government in general should be written in plain English. I entirely agree with that view. Within my Department, I have a particular aversion to a word that has been used to such an extent that it no longer means anything. I refer to "appropriate". There is now the view in the Department that it is no longer appropriate to use the word "appropriate" because it has been used in so many contexts that it has now lost its meaning. I quote that as another example of the importance of ensuring that plain

English is used. The French have a committee for maintaining the purity of the French language. If the Select Committee finds that it has time on its hands, perhaps it could appropriate such a role for itself.

Joined by his hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) was concerned about the fact that a Select Committee that is composed entirely of hon. Members from Great Britain should consider reports from the Northern Ireland ombudsman. I understand the sensitivity of the issue. The hon. Gentleman will understand me if I say that it has wider ramifications than for the work of the ombudsman. Therefore, it is not a matter on which I would wish to comment further except to say that the specific planning example quoted by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East was not unfamiliar to a Member representing a Leicestershire constituency. I could take the hon. Gentleman to many sites in Leicestershire where exactly the same planning issues are being addressed. The problem is not specific to Northern Ireland but none the less I understand the hon. Gentleman's wider point.

This has been an interesting, useful and important debate concentrating on the work of an important institution. It has been a privilege for all those who have participated to have had the opportunity to do so.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sixth Form Education (Wickford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring before the House the anxieties of parents in the town of Wickford in my constituency. It is fairly unusual for a Member of Parliament to come before the House twice in a year about virtually the same problem. We hoped that the problem had been solved as a result of the debate that we had barely a year ago, but, sadly, I am back here tonight because the parents in my constituency are so upset about what is happening to the secondary schools in their area that they have asked me to ask the Minister to intervene on their behalf.

In the town of Wickford we had two good secondary schools. One was called Bromfords and the other was called Beauchamps. They were nice schools with good, healthy sixth forms. One school had over 100 pupils in its sixth form and the other had over 80. They were happy thriving communities and the parents were contented. Into that community in 1988 Essex education authority tossed a bombshell in the form of a plan to establish a tertiary college in nearby Basildon, to which it decided that pupils from our sixth forms would have to go.

We were given to understand that it was necessary that our pupils attend the college so that the size of the new college would justify the expenditure. Without my two sixth forms, the authority could not justify the expenditure of some £5 million on expanding the tertiary college. But we were told that the change, which was not welcomed, would make a much wider range of subjects available to the pupils, would provide better education all on one campus, in the end would save money and the college would be more efficient. The parents in my two schools were indignant. Almost 100 per cent. of them supported two large public meetings. We had a petition, which was signed by almost every parent at the two schools. That in itself was a remarkable occurrence.

The parents contemplated the option of taking their schools out of the control of Essex, but if they had chosen to do so they could not have kept their sixth forms. They were between the devil and the deep blue sea. So I brought the case to the House, hoping that the Secretary of State would overrule a foolish and unnecessary decision. But the Secretary of State saw fit to decide that Essex county council should have its way and that our children should be used in what was virtually a number-crunching exercise.

The children are not number-crunching material to their parents or to me, but at least we were offered the prospect of something better. That was when the council wanted to get its way. We now know that Essex county council was being told at that time by the chairman of the governors of the college, a gentleman called Mr. Tony Stockley, that the college would not be able to cope with the intake that the council contemplated. But the education committee, on the advice of its director of education, Mr. Sharp, was being told that this was the way forward—that there would be appropriate numbers, and that accommodation would be available.

The indignation and consternation amongst the parents can be imagined now that it has turned out that, for the entry that is currently contemplated, the college is short of 400 places. The duplicity of the Essex county council's

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

education committee is indicated by the fact that it knew all along that it would face some kind of problem. I am sure that other hon. Members, like me, think that it would be logical to leave the children in their current sixth forms while the problem was sorted out. However, Essex county council has other ideas. It wants to furnish temporary accommodation in a nearby school in Basildon—Woodlands school—at a cost of well over £100,000. This is a disgrace in view of the better facilities and better teaching conditions available on one campus. What these young people are being offered is infinitely inferior: empty spaces in a school to be patched up—almost botched up. The young people are to use the same staircases as young children in order to get to classrooms. They will not be in the mature environment of an adult campus. In fact, they are being dumped in unsatisfactory conditions.

Last night the parents held another meeting in Wickford to protest at what is happening to their children. Their protest is quite justified. As a result of the decision made in 1990, these two schools have suffered already. The intake from the feeder schools is down by 50 per cent. That is an indication of the fact that parents in the area want a school with a sixth form. They are now sending their children hither and yon, to towns like Billericay. Some are even looking as far afield as Chelmsford and down towards Southend for a school with a sixth form. Good teachers are being lost, as people of high quality like to have sixth form classes. As I spent 10 years teaching in a secondary school, I know how important the sixth form pinnacle is, not only to urge on the younger pupils, but to stimulate teachers and encourage the quality of teaching that is necessary.

The parents believe that there is demoralisation and that standards are going down. As we now realise, all of this is quite unnecessary because the sixth forms could have remained. I am asking the Minister to ensure that that will happen. The accommodation is there and using it would involve no additional expenditure. The equipment is also available. The two schools were already providing 30 subjects, so there was no shortage of choice. That was one of the reasons given for the closure of the sixth forms, but it was not a real reason. The parents want their children to stay where they are. No travelling is involved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) will confirm, travel to Basildon will mean crossing a very busy main road—the A127. For Wickford people, Basildon might just as well be at the top of the Himalayas. That is how they regard the great chasm that the A127 creates.

The community, including the young people, would be delighted if the Minister were to instruct Essex county council to leave the pupils where they are. That would be simple logic and common sense. I know that the Minister has a surfeit of wisdom in this field. I have often heard him speak in the House on the subject of education. Before becoming a member of the Government he extolled the virtues of the quality of education, particularly that which is provided in sixth forms. I know that my hon. Friend will be sympathetic to the case that I am arguing. The chairmen of the governors of both schools support my plea that he take that action. Gordon Wright, the chairman of the governors of Bromfords school, is a Labour member of Essex county council, but he, too, supports our case. The chairman of the board of governors of Beauchamps school is standing tomorrow for the district council, so another respected and intelligent gentleman wants to keep the sixth form.

Of course, the numbers in the sixth forms have dropped in anticipation of the changes, but the two sixth forms between them would provide almost, although not quite, as many places as we need to accommodate at least the children who would otherwise be dumped in temporary accommodation. Four hundred pupils have to be accommodated. I learnt today that the message has gone out on the "pink paper"—an agenda which is not usually made public—that the tertiary college is having to squash classes together and add extra pupils. That will overstretch the wonderful new facilities which the children were promised would result from the move. So those children will not get as good teaching as they have been used to in the schools from which they came.

I am assured that there remain in the schools enough teachers with sixth form experience to carry on that work. Everything points to the need for the Minister to act as I know that, in his heart of hearts, he would want to act, in support of the parents. Those parents are bewildered that a Conservative Member of Parliament, dealing with a Conservative Government and ostensibly, I am sad to say, a Conservative Essex education committee, is faced with a situation in which they cannot be allowed their choice of education for their children—a right that we in the Conservative party believe that they should have. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that we have let those parents down. It is time to reassure them that we will not allow the situation to continue, that we will no longer defer to the bureaucrats on Essex county council who have made such a botch-up of the whole sad business.

There is another path open to the parents. By great good fortune, the Secretary of State for Education and Science recently announced that schools wishing to opt out of education authority control need no longer wait five years to change their status. If the two schools could opt out now, they could keep their sixth forms—at least, I believe that to be the case. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon once had a similar sad story to tell, but it has had a much happier ending. I invite him to try to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, and explain to the House exactly how parents in his constituency managed to solve their problem.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister at least to reassure parents in the two schools concerned that if he can help them in no other way—although I hope that he will be able to help in other ways—he will encourage their growing desire to opt out of the control of Essex county council, which has proved sadly inadequate. He could reassure the parents that if they decided to take such action, he would look favourably and quickly upon their request. Those changes, which are not welcomed by any of the parents involved, are due to take place in September, so we have a relatively short time. The encouragement of my hon. Friend the Minister would make all the difference to their going ahead with the opt-out provision. Anything that he can do to assure them that their children's futures will not be jeopardised by that awful muddle will be greatly welcomed.

I now invite my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon to give his side of the story, which throws light on that sad situation.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I shall invite him.

10.15 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I was here a year ago when my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) raised this issue. It is sad that she must bring it to the attention of the House again this evening.

When Essex county council first proposed a tertiary college to the Department of Education, I had no doubt that my constituents would benefit more from the college than those of my hon. Friend, simply because of the distance involved. As my hon. Friend said, the A127 appears to form a barrier to her constituents in Wickford and Billericay, and I understand that. Throughout the eight years that I have represented my constituency, education standards in Basildon have been improving. Due to the Government's excellent reforms, local teachers have rallied magnificently to take full advantage of the opportunities provided. My own children go to a local state school, St. Anne Line, which my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) has visited, and she will verify that it is an excellent school.

Basildon has excellent secondary schools, such as Fryerns, Chalvedon, Laindon, St. Anne Line, Barstable and Nicholas. There is no doubt that the sixth form entry has been dwindling in some of those schools, so they were pleased when the tertiary college was first mooted.

Basildon college is an excellent establishment and I have no doubt that the sixth form college will be successful. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay will recall our battle with Essex county council in seeking to ensure that fair play took place when the governing body of Chalvedon school wished to ballot the parents to achieve grant-maintained status. I am proud to say that that school is now the first grant-maintained school in Essex. My hon. Friend the Minister recently received correspondence from parents of children at Chalvedon school raising the fair point about the possibility of retaining the sixth form.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay has been tenacious in representing the views of parents, particularly those of Beauchamps and of Bromfords schools, and their desire to retain their sixth forms. Although the tertiary college is of enormous benefit to my constituents, it is surprising that, although the proposals about the viability of the college were put to the Department and the figures were presented, we now find that it is so over-subscribed that it must use the facilities of the excellent Woodlands school in my constituency. That is rather puzzling. Can it be that the notion of a tertiary college is so attractive that all 16 to 18-year-olds in our two constituencies have suddenly decided that they want to use it, or were the figures presented to the Department unrealistic?

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look kindly upon the sensible points that have been raised by our hon. Friend the Member for Billericay.

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): It is normal form in debates such as this to compliment an hon. Member on securing the opportunity to put forward a constituency case. Tonight I must go further than that and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on her tenacity in pursuing this matter.

This is the second occasion on which post-16 education in Basildon and Wickford has been the subject of an Adjournment debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay. I believe that consistency and persistency are the hallmarks not simply of a good constituency Member of Parliament, but of an effective one. My hon. Friend has written to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessor on a number of occasions. She has tenaciously pursued an issue about which she and her constituents hold strong convictions.

I must also pay due tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), who, in his own way, has pursued with great persistence the concern expressed by those of his constituents who favour the recreation of a sixth form at Chalvedon school.

Something has changed since our previous debate on this matter. Thanks to the policies of fostering choice pursued by the Government, and thanks to the new opportunities provided by the Education Reform Act 1988, Chalvedon school has become a welcome addition to the swelling ranks of grant-maintained schools. That school is popular and clearly viable. The head teacher and his governors have at heart the best interests of the children who attend the school.

The existence of a grant-maintained school in the Basildon and Wickford area will provide parents with a wider choice of options for their children than was previously available—thanks to the new opportunities made available by the Government under the Education Reform Act.

The creation of a tertiary college in Basildon will, in its own way, also help to provide parents and pupils with a wider range of post-16 options than was available before my right hon. and learned Friend's predecessor approved, in January 1990, the reorganisation proposals published by Essex local education authority—proposals which are the subject of so much complaint from my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay.

The authority was prompted to reorganise post-16 education in the Basildon and Wickford area because the staying-on rate was so low, the examination success rate was not as good as it might have been and the sixth forms in the school were so small and fragmented that it was becoming difficult to provide a sufficiently wide range of options for their 16-year-olds. Obviously it does not represent good value for money to have small groups of pupils following a limited range of options. By concentrating post-16 schooling in a tertiary college, the range of options available inevitably increases and the education authority is able to make much better use of its teaching and other resources.

On numerous occasions the Government have made it clear that they are concerned to increase the staying-on rate beyond the age of 16 and the figures released only last week show that we are now succeeding. If we are to compete with our European partners in the marketplace, we must ensure that our children are educated to at least the same standards as those in France, Germany and our other Community partners.

It is partly because we are so concerned about the relatively low staying-on rate in the United Kingdom that we have decided, as my right hon. and learned Friend announced to the House on 21 March, to transfer responsibility for sixth form and tertiary colleges from local education authorities to a new funding council and to

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

give them much greater autonomy. I have no doubt that, just as the introduction of local management and grant-maintained schools will do much to improve standards in schools, so the greater autonomy that will pass to sixth form and tertiary colleges in the future will also lead to improved standards, wider options and increased staying-on rates.

For the youngsters of Basildon and Wickford it is, arguably, especially important to provide a wide range of post-16 options, because they have easy access to the London Docklands development area, where opportunities will abound for those who have shown, through their educational achievements, that they are equipped to cope with the new challenges of the next century.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay has sought to argue that Beauchamps school, which lost its sixth form in the reorganisation which was approved as recently as January 1990, should be allowed to reintroduce its sixth form. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon argued similarly in support of the reintroduction of a sixth form at Chalvedon school.

Until recently grant-maintained schools have been discouraged from seeking to change their character during the first five years of their independence. My right hon. and learned Friend said last week that he saw little worthwhile purpose in continuing this five-year rule and that he was prepared to consider proposals for changes in character put to him by grant-maintained schools at any sensible interval after they had been established. In announcing this change, my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out that it was inevitable that grant-maintained schools would want to develop their own distinctive personalities in response to local parent demand and changing circumstances. He gave as an example the possibility that schools might wish to publish proposals for establishing sixth forms.

My right hon. and learned Friend has to judge each application for change of character on its individual merits. Since it might be considered prejudicial to that consideration, I cannot comment on what might happen should proposals be published by the governors of Chalvedon school to reintroduce a sixth form.

Post-16 provision in respect of pupils attending Beauchamps school is a matter for Essex local education authority. If it should, at any time in the future, decide to publish proposals under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 for the reintroduction of a sixth form at Beauchamps school, those proposals, too, will be carefully considered by my right hon. and learned Friend.

I think it only fair to point out, however, in the light of criticisms which have been made by a number of citizens of Basildon and Wickford, that Essex local education authority expects Basildon tertiary college to have to cater for an intake in September, on the basis of indications already provided, of around 1,436 full-time equivalent students, a figure which includes 91 applicants from Beauchamps school, 94 from Chalvedon and 63 from Bromfords, and which is so far above the LEA's original expectations that it has had to make arrangements, to which my hon. Friends referred, to provide additional temporary accommodation for the college in the nearby Woodlands school. I should perhaps stress, since there has been some misunderstanding locally, that this accommodation will only be used temporarily by the college. There is no question of the LEA reintroducing a sixth form at Woodlands school.

By way of comparison, the number of sixth formers, including first and second years, in the nine Basildon and Wickford secondary schools when the decision was taken to establish a tertiary college was about 400, and the number of sixth formers currently at Chalvedon school is 64 and at Beauchamps school 81. It could be argued, I think—certainly Essex LEA would see it that way—that the decision to concentrate post-16 education in the tertiary college has already proved to be a success, in that it has already led to a considerable—some might say dramatic—increase in the number of 16-year-olds wishing to stay on.

I ought also to make it clear—since this seems to have been another cause of misunderstanding in Basildon and Wickford—that the capital costs of establishing the new tertiary college have been nowhere near the figure of £12 million which has apparently gained wide currency. My right hon. and learned Friend has in fact authorised Essex LEA, through its annual capital guideline, to spend in total up to £868,000 on the new college.

I fully appreciate, as does my right hon. and learned Friend, that some pupils will be better suited to the traditional school sixth form. To its credit, Essex LEA also currently maintains a number of secondary schools with large and efficient sixth forms and it has, I understand, no plans to change them. I further understand that it would be prepared to allow pupils in the Basildon and Wickford area who would prefer to pursue post-16 studies in a school sixth form to attend sixth forms in schools in Billericay, Brentwood or Southend, all of which are within reasonable reach of Basildon and Wickford.

We set great store by the breadth of opportunity which is provided for pupils and parents. Pupils in the Basildon and Wickford area now have the opportunity to attend a school maintained by the LEA, or a grant-maintained school. At the age of 16, they have the opportunity of pursuing traditional sixth form courses in Billericay, Brentwood or Southend, or traditional and vocational courses in the tertiary college.

We are also concerned to ensure that local education authorities and schools themselves make best use of the resources available to them. That means, in terms of post-16 provision, that teachers should teach groups of more than five or six at a time, and that the facilities available should not be used by such small groups; and this is not only because tuition on this scale does not represent good value, but because it may not be good for the students themselves.

My hon. Friend is technically asking me to rescind a decision taken by my predecessor. I have no power to do so. However, I have suggested a route forward which she may like to consider.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay and Basildon. They have served splendidly the interests of their constituents who continue to oppose the reorganisation, but I hope, in the interests of all the children in Basildon and Wickford, that those who oppose the reorganisation will at least be prepared to give the college a chance to succeed and to let the schools in Basildon and Wickford—most of which, it must be said, did not object to the establishment of a tertiary college—get on with the task of preparing the children in their

care to face the future confidently and capably, whichever course they may subsequently choose to pursue, given the range of options that this Government have now made available to them.

Question put and agreed to.
Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 2 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Thursday 9 May.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

Read a Second time, and committed.

Mr. Speaker: As the next seven Bills have blocking motions, I shall put the[m] together.

CATTEWATER RECL[AM]ATION BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 9 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sunday Observance

1. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with local authorities about Sunday observance.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): None, sir.

Mr. Marshall: Is my hon. Friend aware that, despite the intervention of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), in a recent referendum in Castlereagh, the people voted 4:1 in favour of the Sunday opening of municipal facilities? Does my hon. Friend agree that a law that is frequently broken and rarely enforced brings the rule of law itself into disrepute and that the Shops Act 1950 should be amended to take account of the needs and opinions of the 1990s?

Mr. Hanley: The Government have no proposals to change the Northern Ireland shops laws at the moment, but intend to keep the position under review in the light of developments in Great Britain.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister accept that the Sabbath is still a special day in Northern Ireland, which is welcomed by the vast majority of the people who live there? Will he assure the House that Sunday opening will not be imposed on Northern Ireland or on its local authorities and that this will remain an option for the local community?

Mr. Hanley: Should any change be contemplated for Northern Ireland, consultations with the interested parties, including the district councils and, of course, Members of Parliament, will take place at the appropriate time. In the meantime, the law is the law.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I welcome the fact that the Minister has said that the law is the law, but how many breaches of Sunday observance have there been among shops in Northern Ireland? Should not this side of the United Kingdom put its house in order before it begins to interfere more in Northern Ireland, without consulting its people? Should not the ordinary people have a say in what is done on Sunday, which is a special day to them?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question, but I am afraid that we do not have any information about the number of breaches of that law. It is almost impossible to tell. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that any change will be accompanied by wide consultation with all the parties concerned.

Community Relations

2. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to encourage business in Northern Ireland to promote community relations; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): The Government believe that it is vital for all sections of the Northern Ireland community to become involved in promoting community relations. I shall be meeting groups of business men and women over the coming weeks to explore what further steps can be taken by the business community to help to encourage greater cross-community contact, mutual understanding and respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is my hon. Friend aware that in the careful progress that is being made towards talks between the parties in Northern Ireland, he carries with him the best wishes not only of the House, but of all those who would like to see an end to violence and division in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Mawhinney: I know that I speak for my right hon. Friend when I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. As he will be aware, the talks to which he referred started on Tuesday. I believe that they carry a large measure of goodwill both within Northern Ireland and beyond.

Mr. Trimble: Is not one of the best ways to promote good relations in business to ensure that the true facts about the religious balance in employment are fully known? Does the Minister agree that the recent survey by the Fair Employment Commission showed that the global position within Northern Ireland is that there is no significant imbalance in employment? Inevitable rationalisation will follow the merger of the Trustee Savings Bank and Allied Irish Banks. Will the Minister ensure that it is done in such a way that a fair balance of employment is produced in the new firm?

Dr. Mawhinney: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, he is asking questions which are important but which stray way beyond my responsibility and into that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who will have heard the hon. Gentleman's question.

Irish Constitution

3. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had recently with the Government of the Irish Republic regarding the removal of articles 2 and 3 from the constitution of the Republic.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): This is a matter which I would expect to arise during the talks upon which we have now embarked.

Mr. Ross: The right hon. Gentleman can be reassured that the Unionist parties at least will raise the matter, even if the other parties do not. Does not his reply signify clearly that no request to remove those obnoxious articles from its constitution has ever been formally made to the Irish Republic? Will he confirm that removal of those articles was held out as a carrot in the early stages of the consultations about the Anglo-Irish Agreement but was soon lost in the mists when the agreement was signed, regardless of what the Republic wanted? Surely it is time that those obnoxious articles were removed once and for all.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman asks me about my conversations. I have said before in the House that I do not believe that the territorial claim in the Irish constitution is helpful. The hon. Gentleman would be surprised if, subsequent to my observation, others had not disagreed with me on occasions when the Irish Government and I met.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Has the Secretary of State heard or read the remarks about articles 2 and 3 of the constitution of the Irish Republic made by a Minister in the Government of the Irish Republic, Mr. Desmond O'Malley? Did the right hon. Gentleman find those words useful? Would he encourage other members of that Government to reach the same conclusion? When the Secretary of State next meets that Government, will he take that stand?

Mr. Brooke: One of the virtues of the talks on which we are about to engage, is that they embrace not only the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland but the Government of the Republic, whose delegation will be made up of more than one party. Any number of different strands of opinion will be brought to our discussions. I shall be surprised if any issue that anyone has ever regarded as relevant to this subject is not aired at some stage in our proceedings.

Cross-Border Security

4. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cross-border security co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic.

Dr. Mawhinney: We continue to discuss with Irish Ministers measures to enhance security co-operation and, in particular, to reduce the threat from terrorism faced by vulnerable individuals and communities in the border area. Where improvements are possible, both Governments are committed to securing them.

Mr. Townsend: I recognise that communications between the two police chiefs have greatly improved in recent years, but is the Minister satisfied that enough is being done on the military front in terms of liaison officers, joint patrols and procedures for hot pursuit? Will my hon. Friend comment on the recent leaking of high security documents from the Garda, which unfortunately found their way into the hands of the IRA? What talks have taken place with the Garda about that matter?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right to point up the good relations and standard of communication between the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland and the Garda commissioner. It is clear to all that security relations between the two have improved considerably and are good, but that does not mean that they cannot be improved. Both Governments are committed to seeking that improvement all the time. The leaked document was clearly a matter of concern. That concern was relayed to the Irish Government. We were happy that they shared our concern and moved immediately to set up an inquiry under a senior officer. We have asked to be informed of the result of that inquiry when it is available.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Minister aware that on the occasion of the removal of two permanent vehicle checkpoints—PVCPs—in county Fermanagh, it was necessary, because of the high level of threat from the IRA, to have 500 extra troops brought into Northern Ireland to protect those who were dismantling the checkpoints? Is he further aware that it was disgraceful that as soon as the checkpoints were dismantled and my constituents were left more open to attack from the IRA, those 500 troops were withdrawn? Was not that a betrayal of the people in my constituency and an abrogation of the responsibility of the British Government?

Dr. Mawhinney: No, I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that it was a betrayal of his constituents. He has been assiduous in representing their best interests, and I am happy to acknowledge that. For our part, we too have been seeking co-operation with the security forces to ensure that the people have the framework of peace and stability to which they are entitled. The logic of the hon. Gentleman's question is that the departure of the troops after the two PVCPs changes was not a reflection on security policy, because the

suggestion was that they were there to do a specific job. General security is a matter of continuous review and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we take it most seriously.

Mr. Kilfedder: As every terrorist atrocity further divides the community, will the Minister point out to the Dublin Government that to develop a rapprochement between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, they must take much more effective measures against the IRA operating along the border, and secure their side of the border if the people alongside it and elsewhere are to live in peace?

Dr. Mawhinney: Those matters are constantly under review and attention is paid to them by us and in our discussions with the Irish Government.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister realise that the people along the border in my constituency are living in absolute fear for their lives? Many of the attacks on the Castlederg area have been made by people who have left the Irish Republic, in which they have found a safe haven, have done their dastardly deed and have gone right back into the Irish Republic. Does he realise that nothing has hindered them in any way, certainly no action by the southern authorities?

Concerning the leaks that have already cost the life of one of my constituents in Castlederg, is the Minister aware that we are alarmed at the improved relationships between the Garda and the IRA? Does he accept the inquiry which, it has been suggested, is sufficient? I assure him that the people in my constituency, who are living in fear for their lives, will not accept the inquiry that has been set up in the Irish Republic and that nothing but a full independent inquiry will be accepted.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is recognised that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents have suffered greatly in recent years, as have the constituents of the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). I am satisfied that the inquiry will be full and rigorous. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in not condemning it, at least until we have received its report.

Mr. Hume: When discussing matters of this type, will the Minister remind the House, and particularly some of those who have been asking questions, the facts about from where violence comes? Will he confirm that virtually 100 per cent. of all people convicted of acts of violence in Northern Ireland are from Northern Ireland?

Dr. Mawhinney: As the hon. Gentleman says, most of the violence in Northern Ireland is generated within the Province. Moreover, the terrorist organisations—both the Provisional IRA and the Loyalist paramilitary—bear the responsibility for the death and destruction that take place in the Province. They must be called to account, both legally and morally, for their actions.

Security

5. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured as a result of terrorist incidents in the month of April 1991.

6. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

7. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation.

Mr. Brooke: Since I answered a similar question on 14 March, 12 people have been killed as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland, 10 of whom were civilians and two members of the RUC. Of those 12, seven were killed during the month of April, five of them civilians. In that month, 38 people were injured in incidents directly related to terrorism.

But for the constant vigilance of the police and Army, those figures might have been even higher. I know the House will join me in praising the brave men and women of the police and Army, who daily put their lives at risk to protect the whole community.

Mr. Taylor: The figures that the Secretary of State has just given are alarming because they confirm the apprehension of people in Northern Ireland that there has been a considerable increase in terrorist killings in the Province. Does the Secretary of State accept that the IRA has increased its campaign of killing because of the progress towards internal talks in Northern Ireland? Does he also accept that it is likely that it will further increase its violence during the period of those talks? If he accepts those fears, what will he do to improve security during the 10 weeks of talks?

Mr. Brooke: I know that the right hon. Gentleman will share my view that one death is one death too many. I agree that the statistics that I read out are dire, but the House will wish to condemn any death as a result of violence. As for his suggestion that there has been a rise in violence, I fear that that rise has occurred on both sides of the community. Some people might think that it has some relationship to the talks in which we are engaged. Warnings have been issued about the possibility of a heightening of violence because of the talks. However, I give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that my security advisers are apprised of that and have every intention of ensuring that the security level is appropriate during the talks process.

Mr. Duffy: Is the Secretary of State aware that one overall objective in common that may transcend any differences that may arise from the talks that began this week is how to put an end to the violence and how to achieve conditions in which the two communities can live peacefully? However, any headway in that direction may trigger an explosion of violence, as the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) warns. I should like, therefore, to press the Secretary of State a little further. What steps is he considering to allay the fears that there may be a collision between the security forces and the paramilitary as the talks progress?

Mr. Brooke: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern but I repeat that my security advisers, the Chief Constable of the RUC, with the General Officer Commanding acting in support of him, are fully apprised of the nature of the threat in which they will be engaged in assessing. There are ways in which one can raise the security level for short periods of time in an appropriate manner. If it is necessary to do so because of any threat of violence to the talks, that will be done. However, I hope that the resolution of those engaged in constitutional

democracy in the Province to ensure that those talks progress and bring the hope of which the hon. Gentleman spoke will itself be a deterrent to the men of violence.

Mr. Molyneaux: Given the oft-repeated assurances of security co-operation between the two Governments, does the Secretary of State know of any good reason why the Irish army fails to protect the forces of the British Army from attacks launched from across the frontier, whatever the terrorists' nationality?

Mr. Brooke: It is probably inappropriate for me to speak on behalf of the commissioner of the Garda because the matter is obviously outside my jurisdiction. However, it is perfectly clear from my conversations with the Chief Constable and the commissioner in the context of the conference, that there is common cause between both of them and both their forces against that threat. If, as the right hon. Gentleman implies, an attack is made on a permanent vehicle checkpoint, that is a matter of concern to the commissioner of the Garda, even if that attack comes from north of the border.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that terrorism feeds on myths and money? Can he report progress on the cutting-off of resources from abroad, and those from within that come from extortion and racketerring?

Mr. Brooke: I know that my hon. Friend would not wish me to go into precise details, but, as a generalisation, the principal financial resources of the terrorists in Northern Ireland, on both sides of the community, tend to be generated in Northern Ireland—as a result of financial crime or racketeering—or in the Republic of Ireland or, I fear, in Great Britain. The amount of resources from outside the islands is relatively modest in terms of the total enterprise, which further encourages Her Majesty's Government to bear down on the terrorists' present sources of finance. If we can place our fingers on their financial windpipe, we shall have increased the likelihood of ending terrorism.

Mr. Mallon: Is the Secretary of State aware that the widow and family of Mr. Fergal Caraher, who was killed in an incident at Cullyhanna at the end of last year, have been unable to obtain the autopsy report? Has not the family suffered enough already? Will the Secretary of State use his considerable influence to ensure that the autopsy report is made available to it immediately?

Mr. Brooke: I want to express my appreciation to the hon. Gentleman for the assistance that he has given to people in his constituency to encourage them to come forward and give evidence in that case. If there are ways in which we can further that ability, I would support them.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: What proposals has the Secretary of State for the security of taxi drivers in the Province?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct to draw attention to the repulsive series of sectarian attacks on taxi drivers—an example of terrorism at its worst. An urgent review of regulations is being conducted to ensure that any possible risk posed to drivers by Government regulations is minimised, consistent with public safety. Let us be clear that terrorists, not regulations, are responsible for the murder of taxi drivers.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he has received from the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary a request to increase the establishment of the force? When might the Chief Constable receive a response?

Mr. Brooke: I can confirm that I have received from the Police Authority for Northern Ireland a request for a substantial addition to the full-time complement of the RUC and its reserves. That request is receiving urgent and sympathetic consideration and I am determined that there should be no undue delay in bringing the matter to a conclusion. I fear that I cannot today give a firm answer about when a decision will be reached. There are currently 12,778 members of the RUC, including the RUC reserve, serving in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: Does the Secretary of State accept that we welcome his statement that security levels will be kept appropriate to the threat, especially during the talks? That must be important to all concerned. Does he agree that the partial ceasefire called by the paramilitaries would be much better received if it were to become permanent and complete; that the problems of Northern Ireland will be solved only by peaceful political means; and that only those who accept that view can make a positive contribution to the future of the island of Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: Of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the whole House would want the ceasefire to become permanent and to represent a renunciation of violence.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed an exceptional run on these important questions, but we must now get on.

Northern Ireland Electricity

8. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): The Government have published a White Paper and draft legislation. Work is progressing to schedule on the establishment of a regulatory regime, the drafting of contracts and the restructuring of the industry.

Mr. Forsythe: Will the Minister confirm that the original recommendation of the Government's advisers, Rothschilds, and of Northern Ireland Electricity's advisers, Barclays de Zoete Wedd, was to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity as a single entity flotation with share ownership in the Province? Will he explain his unseemly haste in rushing this important matter through the House by an undemocratic Order in Council, against the wishes of the public representatives of Northern Ireland and the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: On the second part of the question, this is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a transferred matter. I hope that there will be a lengthy and full debate on it in the Northern Ireland Committee. Nothing will be decided over the course of the summer as a result of the current talks which would in any way affect what happens.

As for the hon. Gentleman's first question, there is no question of the Government's wanting to create a private monopoly out of a public one—the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) made that point in comments reported yesterday. The Government are trying to produce in Northern Ireland a plurality—a mix—of sources of electricity generation which will give the people of Northern Ireland the most competitive price for domestic, commercial and industrial use.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister accept that the people of Northern Ireland are wholly opposed to the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity? Does he accept that it has more to do with political dogma than with reality? When all the people of Northern Ireland and all its constitutional parties are against the move, why do not the Government yield to the pressure from Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: Does the hon. Gentleman want continued nationalisation? Does he want 50 per cent. overcapacity above maximum demand? Does he want 70 per cent. of generation in Northern Ireland to continue to depend on oil? One result of the nationalisation policy is that £93 million worth of equipment is sitting under tarpaulin. Until privatisation started to be discussed, there was no discussion of gas, little discussion of an interconnector and the lignite option had been put on one side. Has nationalisation worked for the consumer in Northern Ireland? The answer, as I am sure the people of Northern Ireland, looking at their bills, would agree, is no.

Mr. Beggs: The Minister must be aware that the high cost of electricity in Northern Ireland cannot be blamed on the Northern Ireland Electricity service because it was his Department and previous Departments that approved the over-dependence on oil. The Minister knows very well that the cost of electricity in Northern Ireland could have been reduced by the completion of phase 2 of Kilroot, but that NIE has not had the money to proceed with it. As we are very concerned that the Minister's Department has spent £3·5 million in the past two years on consultants' reports, £500,000 of which was related to the privatisation of electricity, will he tell us how much was spent on obtaining from consultants the report that enabled him to advance the privatisation proposals in their present form, which will never be accepted by anyone in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: When my right hon. Friend introduced our proposal the hon. Gentleman said:

"Northern Ireland industry and Northern Ireland consumers have been crucified."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 289.]

No doubt he said that in the context of the existing Northern Ireland Electricity service. The hon. Gentleman has criticised the management, the cost of electricity and the lack of a gas supply and he has spoken about the lack of the lignite option. However, he has had a Pauline conversion on the road to Larne and now wants a continuation of the existing system. That does not make any sense for the Northern Ireland consumer.

Mr. Kilfedder: Over the years the Government have frequently castigated Northern Ireland politicians for not being able to get together and reach agreement on anything. Now that the constitutional parties represented in the House have reached agreement, should not the Government reward them and encourage them to reach further agreement on other matters by withdrawing this contemptible measure?

Mr. Needham: It appears that they have agreed to continue with a form of nationalisation, which certainly has not served Northern Ireland industry. Perhaps hon. Members should ask the workers at Harland and Woolf, Shorts, Montupet, Fruit of the Loom and Daewoo what they think about having to pay prices that are sometimes 30 per cent. above those large users in the rest of the country.

Mr. Jim Marshall: The Minister's statement in reply to an earlier question was one of the most outrageous that the House has heard. I remind the Minister that it was his Government who refused to build a gas pipeline and to make money available for the development of phase 2 at Kilroot. There is widespread condemnation, not just by politicians but by all sections of the community in the Province, of the Government's proposals, particularly the specific proposals for the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity. Will he at least think again about postponing any final decision until the constitutional talks have come to fruition and, we hope, reached a successful conclusion? In such circumstances, politicians in the Province would be able to make the final decision.

Mr. Needham: I said to the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) that nothing that will happen in the summer will in any way stop any new arrangement after that being the subject of a separate decision. However, that is no reason for us to stop seeking ways to make sure that the Northern Ireland consumer has as plural and as big a mix of sources as possible. I remind the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) that in 1975 his Government gave permission for the purchase of equipment for phase 2 at Kilroot. Since then that equipment has sat under tarpaulins and, in any event, it would not necessarily reduce electricity prices in Northern Ireland. It excludes the discussion of matters such as interconnectors and a gas supply from Scotland. It was a typical example of a nationalised industry making a poor decision with bad planning and coming up with an option which, if it had excluded flue gas desulphurisation, would have been a dirty option to boot.

Mr. Hume: The Secretary of State and his Ministers have made intensive and praiseworthy efforts to get agreement among politicians in Northern Ireland. When we do reach agreement, will the Secretary of State and the Minister encourage us to continue by agreeing with us, particularly on a matter that affects every home in Northern Ireland? We are against the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity. What consideration do the Government give to the fact that all parties in Northern Ireland have asked for this matter to be reconsidered?

Mr. Needham: I am sorry to repeat myself, but there is no question of what we are doing over the next few months altering our position. I hope in the next few months to persuade the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that the best way forward for his constituents and his business people is to go down the route that we propose. That route will give his constituents and investors much lower electricity prices and a much better service than those which they receive under the present nationalised regime.

Mr. Speaker: Question No. 9, Mr. Bellingham.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that a point of order arises. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not complaining because he has not been called.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that a point of order arises on that.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Other hon. Members have been called——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may not have been called, but a member of his party was.

Small Businesses

9. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent measures he has taken to support small businesses.

Mr. Needham: The Government remain totally committed to supporting small businesses primarily through the work of the Local Enterprise Development Unit, Northern Ireland's small business agency.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to the noble Lord for that helpful reply. May I congratulate him on the excellent work that he is doing in the Province, which has the full support of so many of my hon. Friends. Can he tell the House about the role played by LEDU in supporting small firms? Does he agree that Northern Ireland will not solve its economic problems unless it has a thriving small firms sector and an enterprise culture that flourishes?

Mr. Needham: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is crucial that we have a successful small enterprise side to the economy. LEDU has so far opened 30 centres and has provided some 1 million sq ft of space for small businesses and over 2,000 jobs. Furthermore, today it has announced the figures for last year, when it promoted just under 7,000 jobs, which is 1,000 beyond its target. By all the statistics that we have, the Northern Ireland small business sector is doing extremely well.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Does the Minister accept that, welcome though the initiatives are to small businesses, they are doing absolutely nothing to halt the avalanche of job losses that we have seen this year? The Minister must recognise that nearly 2,000 jobs have been lost in the first four months of the year, with nearly 1,000 job losses being announced in the past week. Does he realise that unless there is a change in Government policy or in Government, or preferably both, there will be no substantial change in the employment position in the Province?

Mr. Needham: The increase in unemployment in Northern Ireland from March 1990 to March 1991 was 0·4 per cent. compared with 66 per cent. in the south of England. The numbers in employment in Northern Ireland in the same period increased by 3,000 or 0·6 per cent., whereas in the rest of the country they decreased by 1 per cent. If we look at what small businesses are doing in the "Make Belfast Work" area, we see that they are more successful at reducing the numbers of the long-term unemployed there than elsewhere in the Province. All the economic commentators within Northern Ireland and outside are pointing out that Northern Ireland is riding the recession better than any other region; we are very pleased about that.

Rev. Ian Paisley *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will call the hon. Gentleman, but would he like to choose between this question and question 10?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I will take this one. A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, Mr. Speaker.

How can the Minister mislead the House today by saying——

Hon. Members: "Withdraw."

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that. A Minister does not mislead the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I will reword it. How can the Minister pretend to the House today that he is supporting small businesses when he knows very well that the cash which those small businesses are chasing comes from the larger employers and from the employees of the major industries? Is he aware that more than 1,000 jobs have been lost in Northern Ireland in the past few days? That means that those people will not be in a position to support new small industries. Is not he aware that there will be so much unemployment that all the small businesses will be in jeopardy?

Mr. Needham: I accept that we have had job losses and I bitterly regret that, but at the same time we have a large number of companies in Northern Ireland that are continuing to employ people and taking on staff. For example, Shorts has taken on 1,300 people in the last year; Harland and Wolff has been taking on staff; Daewoo has taken on staff; and Montupet is still recruiting. The hon. Gentleman does the economy of the Province no benefit at all if he tries to knock it and reduce confidence at a time when everybody accepts that it is doing better than any other part of the economy.

Political Talks

10. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement about progress in the talks with political parties.

12. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the results of his consultations relating to his initiative on political progress in matters relating to the Province.

Mr. Brooke: As foreshadowed by my statement to the House on 26 March, formal political talks in relation to Northern Ireland are now under way. These talks have the potential to secure major improvements in relationships within Northern Ireland and beneficial changes to relationships among the people of the island of Ireland and between the two Governments. However, the process has only just started; a considerable amount of work lies ahead of all the participants and it is too early to assess the prospects for a successful outcome.

Mr. Canavan: If it is the Government's intention to try to resurrect some form of Stormont Parliament, would not it be typical of the Government's double standards to continue refusing a Parliament for the people of Scotland,

who constitute a nation, while apparently agreeing to set up a Parliament for Northern Ireland, which consists simply of a gerrymandered collection of six counties?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman will understand if I say that I find the final part of the question offensive to the people of Northern Ireland. Secondly, while the Government are playing a part in the talks, the four constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland will be playing a part likewise. The agreement that I hope will emerge will do so as a result of propositions, put forward from all round the table, on which I hope that we shall be able to find agreement.

As for the central part of the hon. Gentleman's question, Government structures which are appropriate to Great Britain are not necessarily appropriate to Northern Ireland; and the same is, of course, true in reverse.

Mr. Latham: Since my righ t hon. Friend has obviously very sensibly decided on a publicity blackout on this matter, may I simply express the hope that he will succeed where Gladstone failed and that his success will be rather greater and more popular than that of Lloyd George?

Mr. Brooke: It will be a loss to the House when my hon. Friend hangs up his boots for the last time in terms of the historical insights into our affairs which he gives. I must say however, that in the affairs of Ireland I have no shortage of historical advisers.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the local elections today should be about which party most efficiently delivers quality services at the lowest cost?

The Prime Minister: They certainly should be and I hope that in the eyes of the electors they are. If they turn out to be so, I believe that the cost of each Labour councillor, which is very substantial, will be noticed by the electorate, who will vote accordingly.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister agree with the British Medical Association's judgment that there is a crisis for patients and for doctors in the national health service and that, in its words,

"The Prime Minister is unaware of what is happening throughout the country."?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, I had a seminar with many leading figures in the health industry at Chequers on Saturday morning. It is an odd question from the right hon. Gentleman, who admitted over the weekend that there would be no more money for health under a Labour Government. The point which I believe that the BMA should consider is that it is improbable, with £30 billion going into the health service, that each and every one of those pounds is being used to best effect. The purpose of our reforms is to ensure that that money is used to best effect on patient care so that the patient may get the best possible value for the contribution that he makes to the health service.

Mr. Kinnock: With that response the Prime Minister not only proves his desperation in misrepresenting me, but proves the BMA's case that he really does not know what is going on in the country. The secretary of the BMA, Dr. Ian Field, reports that, because of the Prime Minister's so-called NHS reforms, hospital clerks are having to take life-and-death decisions about which patients should be admitted and which should be turned away. If the Prime Minister does not think that that is evidence of crisis, just what does he think would constitute a crisis?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the gentleman to whom the Leader of the Opposition has referred should have examined more carefully what is happening in many other parts of the country, quite apart from the general increase in NHS funding. For example, he might look at many of the trusts. In the case of North Western, no cuts are planned, and new staff posts are being created. The same applies to Mersey, West Midlands, Trent, East Anglia, Yorkshire and many other areas. It would be a great help to the national health service if people were to look at its achievements and its improvements, rather than carp, criticise and pick out difficulties that have always existed and, in an organisation of such size, may always exist.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister can be sure that the consultants and other doctors in the BMA are well aware of the qualities of the national health service. Indeed, they work in it continually and they support it continually. When they say that there is a crisis for patients and doctors in the NHS as a result of the Prime Minister's reforms, does not he think that he owes it to them, first, to meet them very soon and, secondly, to stop opting out and adding to the crisis?

The Prime Minister: As I have said to the BMA in my letter, I will be prepared later this year to meet it to discuss the matter. If the right hon. Gentleman is inclined to quote the BMA, let him recall that the association opposed many past improvements in the health service. It opposed the very establishment of the service, in which case it was wrong; it opposed the drugs list, in which case it was wrong; and, only last year, it opposed the GP contracts, yet, in *GP Magazine*,* it now says:

"Suddenly, targets don't seem so bad after all . . . Most GPs will find themselves significantly better off . . . than they were last year."

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should examine that more carefully.

Mr. Cash: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the draft treaty that the Luxembourg presidency has made available to only a very limited number of people—and certainly not to Members of this House—in the European Community? Does my right hon. Friend know that that draft treaty contains provisions that would result in a severe diminution in the powers of this House? Will he give us an assurance that, although we want to co-operate in Europe —we are pro-European—the proposals in this paper, which combine a reduction in the powers of the

* See Mr. Speaker's statement on 7 May at column 625.

Westminster Parliament with an increase in the powers of the European Community, are unacceptable in their present form?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I have on a number of occasions made clear our position in both intergovernmental conferences. The document to which he refers is, as he has said, a draft treaty prepared by the Luxemburgers. It has not been agreed by us—indeed, it has not yet even been discussed by us—and we have put forward our own particular proposals for both intergovernmental conferences.

Q2. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Watson: The Government's proposed replacement for the poll tax promises 100 per cent. rebates for those on low incomes. Why will not the Prime Minister give an assurance today that the same principle will be applied to the nearly 6 million people who will remain liable to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax for at least another three years?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, when the 20 per cent. arrangement was introduced, income support was also introduced to compensate, to ensure that people had the resources to meet those charges. That remains the position.

Mr. Jopling: Will the Prime Minister find time today to ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to ensure that all advertisements are decent, legal and truthful—especially advertisements put in the press by trade unions on behalf of the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: That would certainly be an improvement, if it happened. I join my right hon. Friend in condemning the advertisements to which he refers, with their phoney pictures and fake statistics. How similar that is to so much of what we hear at present from Opposition Members.

Q3. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Prime Minister accept that we are extremely interested in his addiction to seminars' if he comes to Scotland we shall arrange one, at which he can explain to the people of Scotland why he is proposing to introduce a tax that is theoretically less onerous and less regressive than the poll tax, while at the same time allowing a rebate of 100 per cent. How can he explain the persistence of the 20 per cent. rule for the poll tax, and how does he view the difficulties of Scottish local authorities, because he knows that the poll tax is uncollectable?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman must have been asleep. I answered that question two minutes ago.

Mr. Burns: During his busy day, has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to see the latest diktat from COHSE, which orders its members to campaign for the Labour party during the local elections? In the light of that diktat, does he agree that nothing that the union says about the health service should be believed, because it is not objective and is politically biased?

The Prime Minister: Given its past activities, I should be surprised if COHSE did not operate in that fashion, and that applies to NUPE as well. But, as the Leader of the Opposition gets so many of his policies from them, that is no surprise to any of us.

Q4. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dunnachie: Does the Prime Minister agree with the chairman of the Conservative party, who has declared that all voters are jerks, or does he agree with the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who has said that they are all morons? Or does he agree with the majority of the British people, who say that senior Cabinet Ministers are a disgrace to the country?

The Prime Minister: As none of those comments was made in the way in which the hon. Gentleman suggests, there is nothing to withdraw.

Mr. John Townend: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is still a Government priority for British business men and farmers, after the completion of the single market in 1992, to be able to compete on a level playing field with their Community competitors? If so, will my right hon. Friend have a word with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and advise him not to impose on the pig industry financial burdens that our competitors on the Continent need not bear—especially the competition from Denmark and Holland?

The Prime Minister: It is certainly our intention to see a level market, not only in agriculture but in all matters of European trade. All my right hon. Friends are aware of that and act accordingly.

Q5. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sillars: May I draw the Prime Minister's attention to a statement made recently by the housing convenor of the city of Glasgow? According to that statement, given the present level of capital consents it will take 300 years to cure the damp problems experienced by the people of that city. That was said seriously, not facetiously.

Is the Prime Minister aware that the present level of damp in Glasgow poses a serious risk to the health of children in particular. Will he deliver to the citizens of Glasgow the same respite as his Government gave to the rich people who bought shares in privatised English companies? Will he wipe off the capital debt of the city of Glasgow and give the people there an opportunity to enjoy decent housing in a much shorter time than 300 years?

The Prime Minister: I think that we would all like everyone in the country to have increasing access to decent housing. As the hon. Gentleman will know, in the past 10 years—across the country as a whole—there have been 2 million more homes, which is equivalent in practice to a city twice the size of Birmingham. He will understand the

extent of the improvements that have been made. As for the position in Glasgow, the way in which individual authorities use their housing receipts, their capital receipts and their revenue sums is a matter for them and they must determine what priorities they must meet.

Q6. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Speller: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the horrific accident on the north Devon link road at 3 o'clock this morning when a var bound from South Molton was in collision with a minibus carrying several Icelandic tourists, three of whom are dead and six of whom are desperately injured? Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as the tourist season begins, we need adequate police resources to ensure that there is safety on the roads, which is best ensured by a police presence?

The Prime Minister: I was sorry to hear of that dreadful accident and I am sure that the House will join me in expressing sympathy to the families of those involved. As my hon. Friend will know, the Road Traffic Bill currently before Parliament will strengthen road traffic law and penalties. In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will spend well over £6 million in 1991-92 on direct road safety campaigns in an effort to minimise the terrible accidents that we so frequently see, to an example of which my hon. Friend has referred.

Q7. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAvoy: The Prime Minister keeps making pious declarations about his personal commitment to the national health service, but is he aware that in my constituency Greater Glasgow health board has privatised care of the elderly? In other NHS hospitals there are to be en-suite toilets and bathrooms, but in that privatised hospital in my constituency there are to be communal toilets and bathrooms. When my frail and elderly constituents are being herded like cattle to use those communal facilities, will this personally committed Prime Minister feel any personal sense of shame?

The Prime Minister: Anticipating what the hon. Gentleman might touch upon, I looked at Greater Glasgow health board's record. It has, as the hon. Gentleman neglected to mention, awarded 58 contracts under competitive tendering arrangements and the resultant savings of £32·7 million will go directly into patient care. It has also entered into a contract with a number of people to provide more beds for care of the elderly. Greater Glasgow health board has a good record which the hon. Gentleman neglected to mention.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: When my right hon. Friend comes to consider the route for the Channel tunnel rail link, will he look seriously at the alternatives to British Rail's proposal? Will he take the opportunity to meet the professional partners of Bechtel and Ove Arup to discuss with them the benefits of their route at first hand?

The Prime Minister: We will certainly look carefully at all alternatives. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will do that with great care.

Q8. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Given that the Secretary of State for Scotland opposed test drilling for nuclear dumps in his constituency and the Secretary of State for Energy, who is in charge of Nirex, opposed similar test drilling in his constituency, how can the Prime Minister justify permission being given for such test drilling in Dounreay, against massive democratic opposition locally and throughout Scotland? Is that a case of double standards?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the decision at this stage is only to test the boreholes for repositories for nuclear waste. If a borehole turned out to be satisfactory, there would need to be a further detailed planning application before any waste could be deposited.

Bangladesh (Disaster Relief)

3.33 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government assistance to Bangladesh following the cyclone disaster.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We are making £2·5 million available for immediate disaster relief. Of this, £1·2 million represents the British Government's share of emergency aid of 10 million ecu from the EC announced earlier today. We shall consider possible further assistance once we have a clearer picture of what is required in this tragic situation.

Mr. Foulkes: Opposition Members would like to join in the many expressions of sympathy to those who have lost relatives, homes and possessions in this appalling disaster. I know that the Minister will join in that sentiment. These disasters occur all too regularly in one of the world's poorest countries.

I hope that the Minister will agree that the Government of Bangladesh are unable to deal with the consequences of the disaster without major outside assistance. From what the Minister has already said, I am afraid that I must say that the Government's response so far fails to match the scale of the disaster.

Will the Minister confirm that the Government will respond speedily and generously to all requests for urgent assistance for food, clothing, medicine and shelter, either directly or by grant aid to voluntary bodies? In the longer term, will he ensure that assistance is available to help with the reconstruction of industry and to help to replace the crops that have been destroyed?

Will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office also now seek a substantial increase in its inadequate aid budget, which is already squeezed by the vital help to the Kurds and for the famine in sub-Saharan Africa, so that we can help properly with this major crisis and with the long-term consequences without affecting our other aid commitments?

Will the Minister also now give an assurance that he will talk to his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and examine urgently the deployment of personnel and equipment from the Gulf and elsewhere to help with relief and communications, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and others have called?

Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but this is a private notice question.

Mr. Foulkes: But the answer was inadequate, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, will the Minister recognise that the stricken people of Bangladesh, for whom we in this country have a very special affinity, need our help with the same commitment with which we deployed forces to liberate Kuwait? We demand that kind of commitment and those resources from the Government today.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I can most certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman's first comments. The British Government send their sympathy to the acting President of Bangladesh and the Government in Bangladesh and to all the people who have suffered so miserably in this recent disaster.

However, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) went on to say one or two other things with which I must take issue. He said that our response failed to match the scale of the disaster. This is the immediate response of the British Government. The position is as yet extremely unclear. Of course it is a great disaster, but quite what the British Government will ultimately be able to do will be assessed in the light of developments and a full assessment of the situation. This is the speedy response that we are able to make now. Should emergency food be required in the next few days, it will of course be made available.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, a large number of non-governmental organisations are operating in Dhaka and in the whole of Bangladesh. They will be able to assess the needs and report back to us and to help us to distribute aid as and when that is appropriate.

It should not be forgotten that this emergency aid is also made in the context of a very substantial aid programme for Bangladesh as a whole. We are currently giving £50 million a year and that is——

Mr. Foulkes: That is not relevant.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Well, it is relevant, because the hon. Gentleman asked whether I would ensure that we give aid to rebuild Bangladesh's industry and I make this point under that latter heading. We are currently giving £50 million-worth of aid annually in the context of £211 million-worth of aid over the past four or five years. That is our bilateral aid, and in the past five years we have contributed towards £117 million-worth of multilateral aid. Bangladesh receives the third largest amount of all our aid programmes. The Ministry of Defence matters will be reported to the MOD.

I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about Bangladesh and Britain having a special affinity. He has visited Bangladesh recently and so have I. He has seen the friendship and was able to observe the welcome political developments and the development of democratic institutions in Bangladesh, which only encourages that affinity and our desire to help in this tragic situation.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is an appalling tragedy, which has happened within the past 24 hours and caused an enormous loss of life. Will my hon. Friend inquire about what sort of medical aid might be needed? In particular, will he ask whether stocks of cholera vaccine are available, which could be sent to Bangladesh? As his Department's records show, during the Bangladeshi crisis 20 years ago, at the time of its independence from Pakistan, there were 10 million refugees and a massive risk of cholera. This country supplied a great deal of vaccine, which saved a great many lives.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Of course, that is something that the ODA will be most happy to assess, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. At present, communications with Bangladesh are extremely poor. It is impossible to make telephone calls from Britain to Bangladesh, and all communication is by telex and

telegram. We shall be taking advice from the large number of NGOs operating in Bangladesh, and especially in relation to my hon. Friend's point.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The whole House naturally feels that it is a terrible tragedy, and will support what the Government and the European Community have done. Is the Minister aware that there is an immediate need for collapsible and inflatable boats, and we should be able to help with that within the next 24 hours. In the longer term, will he reconsider the ODA's contingency fund, which must have been severely depleted by a succession of disasters? Armed with the Prime Minister's declaration of intent, will the Minister go back to the Treasury and obtain more funds for the ODA?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: At this moment, the need for items such as those to which the right hon. Gentleman refers is being assessed by ODA workers, as and when they can, and by NGO operators in Bangladesh. I take note of the right hon. Gentleman's second point, which is certainly something that must be considered.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in such a disaster, it is most important that there is full contact with the high commission in London? Does he further agree that the high commission's requests will probably be about practical matters, such as the provision of tents, medical supplies and, indeed, boats?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We shall certainly take advice from the high commission in London. However, it has grave difficulties communicating with its Government in Bangladesh—indeed, I suspect that its communications are not as good as ours. We shall certainly listen to any requests from the high commissioner.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The House is shocked by the scale of the tragedy and by the terrible toll of human life that has already been exacted, with many more to come. The House will have noted, and perhaps appreciated, the Minister's initial reaction, but a much more forthcoming and generous reaction will be required as the details of the tragedy start to flow in.

I wish to put two specific questions. First, can the Minister tell us anything about the availability in the United Kingdom of collapsible boats and of medical supplies to deal with cholera and dysentery, to which reference has already been made? Are adequate supplies available? Secondly, for the longer term—this is not the first awful cyclone to hit the bay of Bengal—what progress has been made with the Bangladeshi Government and others to erect more permanent coastal defences in the bay of Bengal and to build anti-cyclone shelters throughout the area?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's initial words. I reiterate that we are ready to consider further assistance. This is a first reaction, and I invite the right hon. Gentleman to take note of that. I regret that I cannot comment today on the availability of collapsible boats, but officials who are listening to the debate will immediately investigate that when they leave the House.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me to comment on what the Government are doing to assist the Bangladeshi Government to deal with the perennial problem of horrific floods in their country. In December 1989, the British Government hosted the donor communities attendance at the Bangladeshi flood conference. That resolved that the first stages of the flood action plan should include a rolling five-year plan involving studies and pilot schemes to investigate various means of controlling and alleviating the effects of floods and cyclones.

We supported, and very much promoted, studies in four different areas that included an examination of the effectiveness of previous flood control schemes and ways to improve them. Those reports will be available in due course, and we shall take what action we can in the light of them.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): In welcoming the Government's swift and continuing response to this human tragedy, as announced by my hon. Friend, may I ask him also to remember that many thousands of members of the Bangladeshi communities in this country will have families who are bereaved or suffering at this time, and will he make the pledge to them that, although whatever can be done will be done for the people in Bangladesh, he will also support those communities through the high commission, the Bangladeshi welfare associations and other groups as much as possible with communications and with counselling?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This country has a large Bangladeshi community, and I know that my hon. Friend is in touch with many of its members. The social services will of course be available to help people in difficulty. The Government will almost certainly do everything they can to promote any help that may be needed by the members of that community in Britain.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Minister said that emergency food would be sent if necessary, but should not that food be sent straight away and not when it is too late? Why cannot the Government get the whole of their act together by, for example, galvanising the Ministry of Defence to send well-stocked helicopters and boats into the area to help its people now?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As I have said, those words will have been noted. The Government will assess what they should be doing in the light of all the available evidence provided to us by non-governmental organisations, the Bangladeshi Government, the high commission in London and anyone else who can give us help in that regard.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Although I welcome all the aid which is going to Bangladesh, I hope that the Minister will have an open mind about dramatically increasing the level of aid that is necessary to alleviate the terrible suffering in Bangladesh. However, will he also turn his attention to the basic economic problems of Bangladesh, such as that country's substantial foreign debt and the low commodity prices that it receives for its products? In the wake of this latest disaster for the people of Bangladesh, will the Minister see whether a new economic understanding can be achieved with that country that will allow the rebuilding of its economy and greater prosperity for some of the world's poorest people, so that at least something can come out of yet another awful tragedy for the people of Bangladesh?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As the House knows, last year when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced the Trinidad initiative at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers conference in Trinidad. That must have some bearing on the situation in Bangladesh. As I have already said, we already have a substantial aid programme to aid Bangladesh.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Has the Minister had any contact with the Bangladeshi high commissioner, and, if so, has the commissioner given any indication of the sort of help from the British Government that would be most welcome? As the Minister knows that the British people are exceedingly generous in appeals to assist at a crisis such as this, he must be aware that if, as the Opposition have suggested, he were to ask the Treasury for money for the aid budget, that would be popular in the country as a whole. Does he agree that it is now time to think about getting something from the peace dividend and to establish a flexible response force from the military so that we can get aid quickly to those parts of the world that are all too often afflicted by such tragedies?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have already answered the hon. Gentleman's latter questions. In response to his first question, officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration are in contact with the Bangladeshi high commissioner.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Minister will have noted the ovewhelming support in the House for the statement that he has just made. Does he accept that the view of the House is reflected in the minds of the British people, who would ask him and his hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development to discourage some commentators from suggesting, as they did this morning on television, that there is aid fatigue? The British people are not mean-minded, and they expect the British Government to reflect their views. Therefore, in addition to what he has said today, will he encourage the Minister for Overseas Development to inform the Treasury that although, as we heard in the press this morning, it is seeking cuts, it has not been over-generous with her Department? Does the Minister agree that the crisis underlines an overwhelming need which ought to be met?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should have thought that the enormous response of the British Government to the tragic developments in the horn of Africa—aid for famine-affected Africa is £70 million since September last year —coupled with the enormous response of the British Government to the tragedy of the Kurds in recent weeks shows most clearly that there is no such thing as aid fatigue in the British Government when such disasters occur.

Business of the House

3.50 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

TUESDAY 7 MAY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill followed by progress on Committee stage of the Finance Bill, followed by remaining stages of the Maintenance Enforcement Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 8 MAY—Completion of Committee stage of the Finance Bill, followed by remaining stages of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Bill *[Lords]* followed by remaining stages of the Agriculture and Forestry (Financial Provisions) Bill.

THURSDAY 9 MAY—Proceedings on the Social Security (Contributions) Bill.

FRIDAY 10 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 13 MAY—Opposition Day (11th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject for debate to be announced.

The House will wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet on Wednesday 8 May at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents Nos. 4084/91 and 4548/91 relating to environmental protection.

European Standing Committee B will meet on the same day at the same time to consider European Community document No. 8597/90 and COR 1 relating to unfair terms in consumer contracts.

[Wednesday 8 May
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Document
(a) 4084/91 Environmental Protection of Baltic, Irish and North Seas and of North-East Atlantic
(b) 4548/91 Environmental Expenditure
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 29-xii (1990-91)
(b) HC 29-xvi (1990-91)
European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Document
8597/90+COR 1 Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 11-xxxiii (1989-90) and HC 29-xii (1990-91)]

Dr. Cunningham: Why does the Leader of the House persist in refusing, as he has done again for next week, to nominate a day on which the House can have the opportunity to debate the Government's public expenditure plans? We have been pressing for a debate on public expenditure for three months. A debate on these important matters is long overdue. The Government cannot indefinitely refuse the House the opportunity to debate public expenditure, even though they seek to hide their embarrassment about the recession and the deepening crisis that was reported again in the newspapers today. There have been reports of possible further cuts in the Government's proposals for investment in the public services. The House is entitled to a long-overdue

opportunity to discuss these matters. I urge the Leader of the House to find a day for a debate at the earliest opportunity.

There are reports in the press today that, having withdrawn its original proposals for a route from the channel tunnel to London, British Rail is about to make almost identical proposals, but this time for an overland route rather than a route partly underground. If the proposals are confirmed, they will cause widespread dismay in many communities in south London, Kent and elsewhere. May we have an assurance from the Leader of the House that, if the plans are published and confirmed, the Secretary of State for Transport will come to the House and make an oral statement about the implications of the proposals for the many communities that will be affected? Finally, will the Leader of the House find an early day for us to debate the deepening crisis in the national health service?

It is clear that not only nurses, paramedical staff and unions representing workers in other occupations in the national health service, but doctors clearly recognise that the NHS is in crisis. That is the view of the British Medical Association. Despite all the evidence, the Prime Minister is apparently impervious to the circumstances, which are causing widespread national concern.

We should have an opportunity to debate the situation in the NHS in Government time—the Opposition have already provided one of their Supply days for such a debate, so there can be no criticism of our determination to have the matter on the agenda—not least so that we can debate the implications of the formation of trusts and opt-out hospitals and question Ministers about why, for example, Ministers in the Welsh Office are writing letters to hospitals pressurising them to opt out of the NHS—*[Interruption.]*—as a Minister in the Welsh Office has done recently. The public do not want the developments that are now occurring. Parliament wants an opportunity to debate the issues, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will find time for us to do so soon.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no question of my refusing a debate on public expenditure. I want one—I have made that clear on a number of occasions—not least because it would be an excellent opportunity to contrast what we have achieved with the position of the Labour party on public expenditure. One reason why that cannot occur next week is clear. We have two days on the Finance Bill and, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, largely the same speakers would be speaking in a public expenditure debate as will be taking part in the Finance Bill debates. So there is a difficulty in trying to fit in everything immediately.

Dr. Cunningham: Many hon. Members who are interested in Finance Bill issues will be upstairs in Committee, anyway.

Mr. MacGregor: The Committee does not sit four days a week. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no embarrassment whatever on the Government side. We are very happy indeed to defend our position on public expenditure. It is just a question of having an orderly procedure on our legislation and finding the necessary time.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about British Rail's proposals is that we must wait and see what—as I understand the position from the papers this morning—the British Rail board decides to do. After that, the proposals must go to my right hon. and learned Friend, who will obviously consider them. I have noted the hon. Gentleman's request for an oral statement when my right hon. and learned Friend has had a chance to do that—if I am right in my understanding of the position—and I shall communicate his request to my right hon. and learned Friend.

I totally reject the way in which the hon. Gentleman framed his request about the national health service. Our record is extremely good. He will know of the considerable increases in expenditure, of the excellent progress that has been made in the general practitioner area, and of the excellent ways in which the reforms are proceeding and he will have heard what my right hon. Friend said about, and the great interest he takes in, the NHS. There was a private notice question this week about two of the trusts, so there are plenty of opportunities for the issues to be debated. Because of pressure on the legislative timetable, I cannot promise, in Government time, a day to debate those matters in the near future.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Following Tuesday's decision by the Court of Appeal on the B and Q appeal on Sunday trading, may I ask my right hon. Friend for an early debate on the law in respect of Sunday trading? May we have an assurance that there will be a sense of urgency in the review that is taking place on Sunday trading, as many of us regard the present law as bizarre and out of date?

Mr. MacGregor: I know well my hon. Friend's views on those matters and I believe that next week he will pursue one aspect of them by way of a 10-minute Bill. Although the Government have not yet had an opportunity to study the judgment in detail, I understand that the Court of Appeal decided that a local authority seeking an interim injunction to restrain Sunday trading contrary to the Shops Act 1950 must, like any other body except the Crown, give a cross-undertaking in damages as a condition of the grant of the injunction. That was the court's position and I cannot comment on it further, as the matter may be sub judice. However, local authorities and their legal advisers will no doubt take that into account when considering how to fulfil their duty in enforcing the law on Sunday trading. My right hon. Friend asked when the Government will pursue the reform of the law. He knows that the Government's policy continues to be to achieve agreement on proposals for reform of the Sunday trading laws in England and Wales which are workable and enforceable and enjoy sufficient public and parliamentary support.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 791 in which my hon. Friends and I have drawn attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for Scotland has announced that he is overruling the wishes of Highland regional council on the test borehole hole at Dounreay for the disposal of nuclear waste?

[That this House condemns the decision by the Secretary of State for Scotland to sustain an appeal by the UKAEA against the refusal of planning permission by Highlands Regional Council for the test drilling of holes and the use of explosive charges for a seismic survey at Dounreay; regards this decision as a contemptuous dismissal of the

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

democratically expressed rights of locally elected representatives to defend their communities; and sees the continuing threat of nuclear disposal as a direct threat to the security and development of industries based on the need to retain a pure environment.]

Will the Government find time to enable the House to have a full debate on that matter, given that the Secretary of State for Energy and the Secretary of State for Scotland, who have responsibility in those matters, successfully fought against such action in their own constituencies? The people of Scotland find it difficult to understand why they are being treated as second-class citizens.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Lady will have heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister refer to that matter at Question Time. She will know that the decision of the Secretary of State for Scotland on the Atomic Energy Authority's application for the seismic survey was based —as it had to be—on the planning merits of the proposal. It does not pre-empt a decision on the establishment of a nuclear waste repository at Dounreay. Ministers have given an assurance that any proposal to construct such a repository will be subject to a full public inquiry at which all arguments about its possible impact can be aired. In view of that, if the hon. Lady wishes to pursue the matter relating to the decision about the seismic survey, there are ways in which she can do so. I cannot give Government time to debate that matter, for the reasons that I have just given.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Will the Leader of the House find time next week to debate early-day motion 788:

[That this House believes that the War Crimes Bill should not be presented to Her Majesty for Her Assent.]

Although I have the deepest respect for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and for the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), I suggest to them that no Government of the day should invoke the Parliament Acts. Rather, the matter should be put to the House, because no Executive should be able to railroad through the legislature legislation that it wishes to pass, regardless of its merits. It is quite proper—indeed, it is of the greatest importance, constitutionally—that the House should have an opportunity to vote on the provisions of the Parliament Acts rather than any Government—albeit this one—in their wisdom deciding that the Bill must be pushed through.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand my hon. Friend's feelings on the Bill, but the position is clear. I do not think that the Government are railroading the Bill through. It was fully discussed in the last Session of Parliament in both Houses. There were two debates—one on procedure and one on Second Reading—a short while ago in this House. On all three occasions when the Bill was discussed in the House and there was a major decision of principle—two Second Readings and one debate on the principle of the Bill—the House, on a free vote and by a large majority, showed its view. That was the position in March this year, when we debated the Bill on Second Reading. The Government then made it clear that, although we hoped that it would not be necessary to invoke the Parliament Acts, it would depend on the actions of the other place. If the other place rejected the Bill, the Parliament Acts would be invoked as a last resort. That is the position that we are now in. Therefore, I have nothing to add to what I said yesterday and to what you said, Mr. Speaker, in explaining the automatic process of the Parliament Acts.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The Leader of the House will recall that last week I asked him to take up with his colleague the Foreign Secretary the issue of making available to the House of Commons the draft treaty on political union deposited by the Luxembourg presidency. That matter is of immense concern to hon. Members as the treaty affects the rights, voting rights and powers of the House. The Leader of the House will know that, in response to that request, I received a telephone call from a Minister offering to show me the treaty on a confidential basis. That is quite inadequate, inappropriate and positively insulting to the House of Commons. Will the Leader of the House take up the matter again and ensure that that important draft treaty document is deposited in the Library?

Mr. MacGregor: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, it is a draft treaty and document—a presidential draft—which changes as the situation unfolds so there will not be one, single, definitive document. I immediately took up the request of the right hon. Gentleman last week with my hon. Friend the Minister of State. The right hon. Gentleman responded to my hon. Friend's telephone call with a further letter making the point that he has made today, and I am in discussion with my hon. Friend the Minister about that.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Can my right hon. Friend help a simple fellow like me and explain the nature of next Tuesday's business? What is the business on the Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill, which precedes the Finance Bill? What will we be discussing, and how long will that discussion last?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall not be misled by my hon. Friend, who is not a simple fellow but understands such matters extremely well. However, I am grateful to him for giving me this opportunity to explain the matter a little more. The Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill refers to a debate that we had this week on the estimates for community charge expenditure. For reasons which I think were explained this week, the Bill must be taken automatically following this week's discussions.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Reverting to the issue raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), will the Leader of the House confirm that the draft treaty to which reference has been made is within the public realm in at least one capital of the European Community states? If that is so, would not it be appropriate for it to be fully in the public realm in this country? Will the Leader of the House confirm that he and the Foreign Secretary, while responsible for the royal prerogative, are using it in negotiation for a treaty that reduces it and could lead to its destruction, and consequently to the reduction of the powers of the Crown, of the House and of the British people?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I certainly do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point in this context. I confirm that, as I understand it, the document is somewhere in the "public realm"—whatever that vague phase means. The

position is not precise, in relation to Community or parliamentary procedures, but I believe that the document is available to some. However, as is inevitable in negotiations, I suspect that the document will regularly undergo various changes. I understand the interest in this issue, which is why I am discussing with my hon. Friend the Minister of State how to proceed on it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My right hon. Friend responded to a suggestion that the Government were railroading things through the House. The House will understand that, because of the Government motion on the Second Reading of the War Crimes Bill, there was no opportunity to change the Bill. He will also understand that the procedure has not been used for 50 years and the House has not explicitly voted on the use of the Parliament Acts. I hope that he will reconsider whether it will be possible for you, Mr. Speaker, to sign the certificate because you said that the only thing that would prevent you from signing the certificate and carrying out the Parliament Acts procedure would be an explicit instruction from the House not to do so. The House should have that opportunity.

While we are on the subject of railroading, my right hon. Friend will realise that it was not possible to debate the instruction that clause 50 of the Finance Bill be taken on the Floor of the House. Some people have been more successful in volunteering for places on the Finance Bill Committee than others. I am not certain that the Government side on the Finance Bill has yet had so many successful volunteers that all, bar 25 per cent., are on the payroll, even though many of the Private Parliamentary Secretaries are not in receipt of money. Is it possible to ensure that, if clause 50 remains unchanged in Committee, we could have a full debate on it, if necessary, when the Bill returns to the House on Report?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first matter, as my hon. Friend knows, the Bill is unchanged from Second Reading. It was in the hands of the other place to decide whether it wanted the opportunity to amend the Bill, as it could have done, but their Lordships prevented themselves from doing that by the decision that they took on Tuesday evening.

The House voted on Second Reading in March by a large majority—knowing that the Bill might or might not be changed in another place—and the decision of the House was very clear. The procedure under the Parliament Acts is that, once Mr. Speaker has certified that a Bill has been rejected in another place, it follows automatically that we move to Royal Assent unless time is given in this House to go over all the ground again. I judge from the general reaction that the House believes that it made a clear decision on that matter in March.

On the Finance Bill, we shall obviously have to see what happens in Committee, but my hon. Friend will know that some of these matters can be discussed again at a later stage in our parliamentary proceedings. We had better wait and see what happens.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I reinforce the request, or demand, by the official Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), for an early debate in Government time on health? Now that self-governing hospitals have private business plans that are not in the public domain, we are in a new situation. If the Government are as confident as the right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest, it would be in their interests to allay much of the fear and suspicion in the country by holding a debate, so that some of these matters can be aired on the Floor of the House.

On a point of clarification about Thursday's business: is it intended to take Second Reading and Committee stage of the Social Security (Contributions) Bill then? If it is, I hope that that will not be a precedent for such matters in future.

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I have nothing to add to what I said a short while ago.

On the second point, it is intended to take Second Reading and remaining stages on Thursday. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the single matter to which the Bill refers was in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget, but it was not possible to take it in the Finance Bill because it relates to national insurance contributions and thus requires separate legislative treatment. It is, however, the equivalent of one item in the Finance Bill, which we are also discussing on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Further to the question about British Rail asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), may I tell the Leader of the House that, because the proposal is now for an overland route, between 3,000 and 4,000 homes could lie within 200 m of the track? That will ruin the lives of many people, many of whom are my constituents. People throughout the south-east opposed these proposals when they were before us last year, when the route was primarily underground, so I impress on the Minister the urgency of ensuring that the Secretary of State for Transport comes to the House to make a statement not just about the Government's intentions but to explain how British Rail could make such disastrous proposals twice running, and how it could have failed to take any account of the cross-party consensus that this is a wholly unacceptable route.

Mr. MacGregor: Without going into the issues, and not knowing what is being decided because, like the hon. Lady, I have read only press rumours—unless she has more information than I do—I understand the concern of those who might be affected and the hon. Lady's wish to represent her constituents in this matter. I shall discuss it with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and we shall have to decide whether —and if so, how and when—it is appropriate for the matter to be discussed here.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): May I warmly endorse what the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) has just said and confirm that there is great anxiety in my constituency about the reports emanating about British Rail's proposals? It is imperative that the Secretary of State make a statement to the House at the earliest possible opportunity.

Secondly, will the House have an opportunity to discuss the council tax before a Bill is published? The proposals were embodied in a document issued last week and described as a consultation paper, but we have since heard the Secretary of State say that the bands have been decided and that he has no intention of changing them. Is it a consultation paper, and will the House be consulted on the proposal?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand my hon. Friend's first point and I know how well he represents his constituents' interests. I shall associate him with the requests to my right hon. and learned Friend. I confirm that it is a consultative document. At this stage, I cannot say if or exactly when we shall proceed in the House on the matter. However, I have noted my hon. Friend's request.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): If I heard the Leader of the House aright he said that the two European Standing Committees will meet next week. When can we expect an early statement on the workings of those Committees? If I picked up aright the rumours that the Leader of the House has changes in mind about the Standing Orders that govern those two Committees, will he be good enough to discuss such proposals with the members of the Committees? I remind him that those members are permanent and are not drawn from the poor bloody infantry.

Mr. MacGregor: I am well aware that they are permanent members, because several of them made points to me about the Committees as they progressed. The hon. Gentleman asked about a statement. The appropriate way to handle the matter is in the way that I have suggested on several occasions, by a review at the end of the summer of the way in which the Committees have worked. We may or may not want to make changes at that time and, obviously, at that stage I would wish to hear the views of the members of the Committees. From time to time, there may be a need to make changes, sometimes on minor matters, if that is the general view. I have said that I might wish to do that if it was the general feeling that it would be appropriate to do so. In most cases there would be a proper opportunity, especially if a change to Standing Orders were required, for the House to be consulted and to take a view.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will understand that, at Question Time on Northern Ireland, I welcomed the announcement about the resurrection of a Northern Ireland Grand Committee. However, I am disappointed that there has been no announcement about a debate on the Government's response to the report by the Select Committee on Procedure. When may we expect such a debate, and will the right hon. Gentleman tell us which Department of Government ever welcomed a Select Committee to scrutinise it?

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's main point, he will know that the Government's response appeared only yesterday and that, therefore, it would be highly inappropriate for me to announce today that we intended to debate it next week. We shall have to reflect and see whether the House feels that it requires a full debate. I should like there to be time for all hon. Members to study the Government's response. I have found Departments very forthcoming in their evidence and in the way in which they respond to Select Committees. As the hon. Gentleman knows, matters relating to Northern Ireland have been debated in Select Committees.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on the plight of the Kurdish people, so that the House may have a chance to assess the effects of the aid that has been sent to them and the way in which it has reached people living in the most dreadful conditions on the mountains in Iraq? Such a debate would also enable the House to express an opinion about the need for a long-term settlement based on the rights of the Kurdish people to self-determination, which has consistently been denied since the break-up of the Ottoman empire. Many believe that there will never be long-term peace in the region until the rights of the Kurdish people to self-determination are recognised. That non-recognition is a major factor in instability in the region.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that everyone in the House recognises the seriousness of the plight of the Kurdish people. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have taken the lead internationally both in providing aid through the safe havens proposal and in pursuing other aspects of that through the United Nations. The House is kept fully informed of the Government's thinking and all the action that they are taking on that front. I cannot promise at this stage a debate on the matter. I certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that it is our intention to keep the House fully informed so that hon. Members may question Ministers on the steps that we are taking. I will keep open the possibility of a debate, but I cannot promise one in the near future, because we have a lot of business to conduct.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I draw to the attention of the Leader of the house early-day motion 744, which points out that the Minister for Sport, although he was appointed in the summer of 1990, has yet to answer a single oral question on sport in the Chamber.

[That this House regrets that the Minister of Sport, although appointed in the summer of 1990, has yet to answer a single oral question on sport in the Chamber, and calls on the Procedure Committee to arrange for sport to have a question time allocation, as do the Arts and Overseas Development.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore arrange for the Minister to come to the House next week and make a statement on the MCC's disgraceful decision to blackball Rachael Heyhoe Flint? Is he aware that Miss Heyhoe Flint has not been defeated as the captain of England's cricket team, which is more than one can say about her male counterpart? Perhaps the Blimps and buffers of MCC do not like being associated with success. That might be one reason why they fast-tracked the Prime Minister's application for membership. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the Minister to come and make a statement? If not, will he advise the Prime Minister to resign from MCC in protest against the disgraceful sexist approach?

Mr. MacGregor: It is not for me to comment on MCC's decision, nor is it for my hon. Friend to take responsibility in the House for that decision. I do not think that it would be appropriate for my hon. Friend to make a statement on the matter next week. I know that so far my hon. Friend has not been able to answer a question on sport. I fear that he has been extremely unlucky in the shuffle of questions. I am sure that he would have been only too delighted to answer questions and to defend the Government's policy on sport generally.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman present for the business statement? If he was, I will call him, but it is difficult for me to call him if he has not heard what the business will be next week.

Mr. Powell: With all due respect, I was in for Irish questions.

Mr. Speaker: That is not what I asked.

Mr. Powell: I heard you groan, Mr. Speaker, when I stood up last, but I was waiting for the Leader of the House to comment not only on Sunday trading but about the War Crimes Bill, further to his comments when the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) requested time next week for a debate on Sunday trading. I share the view expressed on behalf of the Opposition yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and, indeed, the view of the Government.

When I listened to the replies of the Leader of the House to questions about the War Crimes Bill, I could not understand why he did not take the same view on Sunday trading. When the hon. Member for Hendon, South moved his Bill, which I opposed, the House decided by a majority of 2:1 to reject it. I cannot understand why the Government will not accept the decision on the same basis as they accept the decision on the War Crimes Bill. Therefore, we do not need more votes on Sunday trading. We took a decision on it in 1986 and we took another decision recently when my hon. Friend presented his Bill. Why cannot the Government accept that decision and ensure the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950?

Mr. MacGregor: It is, of course, for local authorities, not for the Government, to undertake the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950. The hon. Gentleman was a little muddled in the question which he asked. On the War Crimes Bill, the House has twice—on Second Reading and, last Session, through all the proceedings—voted in favour of the Bill. The Bill is proceeding automatically now under the arrangements of the Parliament Acts because the House has taken a clear decision. When the House rejects Bills on other matters, it is always open to the Government of the day or to individual Members to come forward with further proposals. I do not think that it would be appropriate to have a statement on Sunday trading next week because we have made the position clear, in so far as we have been able to judge it from the recent court decision. The general position of the Government, their policy approach and the steps that they are taking are also clear.

Questions to Ministers

4.25 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask you about the listing of questions. The reason I mention this is that, at Northern Ireland questions this afternoon, for the second time, I unfortunately failed to get on to the Order Paper with the question I asked. I appreciate that other hon. Members are perfectly entitled to put down questions, but I think that, with regard to Northern Ireland, as indeed with Scottish and Welsh questions, particular factors are involved. Our constituents take an interest in these questions, and I can imagine the conclusion that may be drawn if an hon. Member does not appear to have asked a question. I recall that, a few months ago, a Scottish Member raised the issue, and I think that you said that the matter could be reconsidered. I wonder whether you could tell us what the position now is.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman will draw that to the attention of the Select Committee on Procedure, I am sure that it will wish to look at it. I believe that the general feeling is that the procedure is working reasonably well. I do take into account hon. Members who are in the Chamber and whose questions are not printed on the Order Paper. Indeed, I was able to call the hon. Member this afternoon. He should take the matter to the Select Committee on Procedure, however, because I am sure that his complaint will be kept under review.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that the Table Office is most helpful in this matter? If an hon. Member's question is not printed because it is below the necessary number, all that he has to do is ask for it to be put down as a written question to be tabled in that form.

Mr. Speaker: That is a very helpful comment, and it is the truth.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In my capacity as a member of the Select Committee on Procedure, I think that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) raises a very good point in respect of both Northern Ireland and Scottish questions. Therefore, I will, of course, refer to the Committee your very wise words on the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Upper Bann has a very powerful ally.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the seven motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Civil Legal Aid (Assessment of Resources) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 635) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Legal Advice and Assistance (Amendment) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 636) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Legal Aid in Criminal and Care Proceedings (General) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 637) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

[Mr. Speaker]

That the Personal Community Charge (Reduction for 1990-91) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 854) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Personal Community Charge (Reduction for 1991-92) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 855) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Community Charges (Levying, Collection and Payment) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 856) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Education (Mandatory Awards) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 827) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Royal Air Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

[Relevant documents: Thirteenth report from the Defence Committee on "Improved United Kingdom Air Defence Ground Environment," HC 591 of Session 1989-90, the first special report containing the Government's reply thereto, HC 288 of Session 1990-91, and the minutes of evidence taken, and memoranda laid, before the Committee on 24 April 1991, relating to "Options for Change: RAF," HC 393, copies of which have been placed in the Library.]

4.27 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): When I opened the Royal Air Force debate last year I drew attention to the major changes then under way in eastern Europe. Much has happened since. We have seen the unification of Germany and the signature of the agreement on conventional forces in Europe. Both are far-reaching developments.

In general, there has been a continued consolidation of the movement towards democracy in the old Warsaw treaty nations, and, while they still face an uncertain future, the lessening of tension across the continent has brought undoubted benefits to East and West alike.

However, hardly had the apparatus of Communism begun to fall apart in Europe than a new threat to freedom and world stability emerged in the middle east. The cynical invasion of Kuwait by Iraq last August and the atrocities committed on the Kuwaiti population demonstrate all too vividly the need to remain vigilant in defending civilised values.

The RAF has been intimately affected by these developments. In the very process of restructuring in the light of the changed security situation in Europe it found itself closely and directly deployed in the liberation of Kuwait. Now it is assisting in the international effort to provide vital humanitarian aid to the Kurds in northern Iraq.

These past 12 months have been particularly challenging for the RAF and, characteristically, it has responded with professionalism, commitment and success. In the critical early days following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, air power was immediately available to us to deploy to the Gulf in time to help deter further Iraqi aggression. We declared on 9 August our intention to send forces to the area in response to a request from King Fahd. Within 48 hours, a squadron of Tornado F3 fighters was in the Gulf and operational at Dhahran air base in Saudi Arabia. Just two hours after arriving, two of these aircraft were airborne on an operational mission. Within the next 48 hours a squadron of Jaguar ground attack aircraft was in place in southern Oman. These deployments were rapidly followed by Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft, air-to-air refuelling assets and other front-line units.

Within days of the order being given, the Royal Air Force had deployed a powerful military force, with the necessary support, at a distance of over 3,000 miles from its main bases. Following the initial deployments, we decided in September to increase our military commitment. In addition to dispatching the 7th Armoured Brigade, we deployed a squadron of Tornado GR1 aircraft to Bahrain, and more Tornado F3 fighters were sent to Saudi Arabia.

In November, the allied military presence was strengthened still further. The British Army contribution was strengthened to reinforced divisional strength. For the Royal Air Force, this meant deploying more Tornado GR1s, including some equipped with the air-launched anti-radiation missile for the suppression of enemy air defence radars. Chinook and Puma support helicopters were deployed to operate alongside British land forces for casualty evacuation and logistic support, and further RAF Regiment personnel to provide ground and air defence for the RAF detachments.

The RAF's response to the crisis was not confined to regular forces. Reserve forces also played a vital role. The Royal Auxiliary Air Force provided aeromedical evacuation and air movement units, and the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve provided support in the areas of intelligence and meteorological services.

From midnight on Wednesday 16 January, RAF Tornado GR1 aircraft were heavily involved in the first wave of attacks on Iraqi airfields. In the first 24 hours of operations, RAF aircraft flew a total of 101 sorties—an intensity of activity that was sustained throughout much of the early period of the conflict.

Those days saw the early attainment of air superiority, which rapidly became air supremacy, with the effective neutralisation of the Iraqi air force. This allowed attacks to be switched from low to medium level.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): is my right hon. Friend aware that, during some the early Tornado attacks, a number of crew baled out and were taken prisoner? Some were tortured and were paraded on world television. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those were horrendous crimes and that the perpetrators should be brought to justice?

Mr. Clark: My instinct is to agree very strongly with my hon. Friend. Quite how what he suggests is achieved may present difficulties, but those difficulties should not be allowed to be insuperable. I am glad of the opportunity to assert our position.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Can my right hon. Friend give the House any further information about the campaign medal that is to be given to our Gulf service men? Can he assure us that it will be not yet another general service medal but a special medal to mark the valour of all our sevice men?

Mr. Clark: Plainly, there will be such a medal. I hope that my hon. Friend will be satisfied to hear that an announcement will be made shortly.

Great care was taken in planning attacks to reduce to the absolute minimum the risk of civilian casualties. To this end, extensive use was made of laser designation and precision guided weapons. All these proved to be among the most effective weapons of the air campaign.

The relative shortness of the land battle, when hostilities finally opened, owes much to the lengthy and highly successful air campaign, which severely reduced both the enemy's will and its capacity to fight. During hostilities, Tornado aircraft were employed against key strategic targets, such as airfields and bridges, while Jaguars flew high sortie rates—without loss—against targets mainly in the battlefield area. I am sure that the whole House will wish to pay tribute to the special courage displayed by our airmen in performing the uniquely difficult tasks presented by having to fly attack missions at low level.

While much has been said and written about the role of the attack aircraft, I should like to say a few words about the less glamorous and sometimes forgotten elements of the force. Modern fighters and fighter bombers have great tactical and operational flexibility, but they lack range. If they are to deploy to distant theatres such as the Gulf, and operate at long range when there, they need the support of tanker aircraft. They also need transport aircraft to move the personnel, ground equipment and weapons that are essential to support high-intensity operations.

During hostilities, the RAF tanker force offloaded some 13,000 tonnes of fuel, while air transport aircraft flew a total of 13 million miles to move some 50,000 tonnes of freight. In addition, Nimrods provided important maritime surveillance through daily patrols in the northern Gulf throughout the period of hostilities.

Our aircraft were originally configured for operation in northern Europe; they needed additional or modified equipment to improve their effectiveness in the harsh desert environment. Navigation enhancements were made to cope with the featureless desert terrain; engines required protection from the effects of sand. Identification and communication systems were provided to ensure that RAF aircraft could operate effectively alongside those of our allies. The support that we received from industry was first-class, with many firms, large and small alike, working long hours of overtime—some of it over the Christmas holiday—to produce and incorporate the many aircraft modifications and new equipments that we required.

The right equipment is essential; but ultimately it is the people who operate it who make the difference between success and failure. I have mentioned the role of the support personnel, and I should now like to pay a tribute to the aircrew, whose outstanding courage, good humour and determination to see the job through deserves the highest praise. They were an inspiration to their fellow service men and women in the RAF, and, I believe, to the nation as a whole.

Thankfully, the cost of the operation in terms of lives lost was small, but that cannot lessen the loss for the families of the five airmen who were killed on operational missions. Those families, I know, have the deepest sympathy of the whole House as they seek to come to terms with the loss of their loved ones.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Keith Mans (Wyre): My right hon. Friend mentioned the right weapons. Has any assessment been made of the runway denial weapon, the JP233? Does he feel that there is a need for a stand-off weapon capability for the Tornado when it is attacking airfields?

Mr. Clark: I do not wish to isolate any particular weapon system used in the conflict. We are undertaking a full and detailed assessment and analysis of every aspect of the functioning of such weapon systems. My hon. Friend has drawn attention to a primary system, which we shall have to consider carefully, but I do not wish to deal with it outside the broader context; I think that it is always better to consider the performance of all the systems in relation to one another and in relation to the outcome of

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the campaign. As I am sure my hon. Friend and the House will understand, I think that it would be premature to comment specifically about individual systems.

As the refugee crisis in Iraq developed, it became increasingly clear that aircraft were the only practicable way of moving relief supplies rapidly to the areas of real need. Late on 5 April, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that United Kingdom aircraft would play a full part in relief operations. Three Hercules aircraft departed for Incirlik air base in Turkey early on 7 April, carrying tents, blankets, sheeting, food and sleeping bags. The first United Kingdom air drops into Iraq were carried out on the following morning.

Since then, often in quite appalling conditions, Royal Air Force Hercules have transported about 500 tons of relief supplies to otherwise inaccessible areas. Now that the refugees have started to come down from the mountains, and given the sheer volume of relief support which has been contributed by British, United States, Italian, Canadian and French aircraft, we hope that it will soon be possible to bring that part of the operation to an end. However, the task of the RAF Chinook and other Royal Navy and Army helicopters will continue.

The first RAF Chinook helicopters arrived in Turkey from the United Kingdom on 13 April. Others, en route home from the Gulf, were turned around in remarkably quick time to join them shortly afterwards. The Chinooks are now flying from forward operating bases close to the Turkey-Iraq border, taking supplies forward and evacuating sick and injured refugees.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my hon. Friend clarify whether the cost of the relief operation for Kurdish refugees will be borne by the defence or the overseas aid budget?

Mr. Clark: The cost of the supplies is being met from the overseas aid budget by the Overseas Development Administration and the Foreign Office vote, but the Ministry of Defence will be meeting many of the operational costs, and my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chancellor will be discussing the exact allocation and its impact on our budget in the fulness of time when the operation is concluded.

I referred earlier to the changes in Europe and their implications for the RAF. We welcome the close interest being taken by the Select Committee on Defence in this matter. The House will be aware that attention has been drawn to the Committee's most recent contribution in the context of this debate.

The House will be familiar with the "Options for Change" proposals announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last July. The expected break-up of the Warsaw pact as a military body is now confirmed, and that has to be a major factor in our thinking about future European security.

A graphic illustration of the recent reduction in East-West tension is the fact that the chief of the air staff was allowed to fly the Soviet Flanker aircraft which visited Farnborough last year. I have read his report on that experience, and very entertaining and impressive it was. However, on arms control, progress has been somewhat patchy. The conventional forces in Europe agreement is welcome and marks real progress, but we have continuing concerns about Soviet forces east of the Urals and the resubordination of army units to the Soviet navy.

Under "Options for Change", our aim is to restructure the RAF into a balanced force equipped to meet the needs of the 1990s and beyond. Hon. Members will recall the detailed changes to the RAF front line foreshadowed in the July statement by my right hon. Friend. Those included withdrawing from service the Phantom air defence aircraft, reducing the number of Tornado GR1 squadrons with nuclear and conventional roles in Europe from 11 to six and re-equipping a further two squadrons of dual-capable Tornado GR1 aircraft with Sea Eagle missiles to replace the present Buccaneer force in the anti-ship role.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Minister will be aware that the Buccaneers are essentially based at RAF Lossiemouth in my constituency. I note from the minutes of evidence given to the Select Committee that consideration is being given to placing the maritime strike Tornados at Lossiemouth. When will we be likely to hear such an announcement?

Mr. Clark: I cannot give the hon. Lady a precise date at present, but I will make sure that she is informed the moment that a decision is made, which I expect will be relatively soon.

We plan to upgrade all Tornado GR5 aircraft to GR7 standard, with the addition of a night attack capability.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): Harrier.

Mr. Clark: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon. I blame the word processor.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): National health service eye tests now have to be paid for.

Mr. Clark: I do not wear glasses, but my vision would have to be fairly defective to misread Harrier for Tornado. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for implying that I am not reading the text but simply delivering my speech ad lib.

The first full squadron of GR7 will become operational this year and it is expected that the full conversion programme will be complete by the mid-1990s. We are currently negotiating an order for new Harrier T10 training aircraft to meet the rigorous training requirements for the GR5 and GR7.

The RAF has now taken delivery of its first Boeing E3D Sentry airborne early warning aircraft, which will operate from RAF Waddington. The second E3D is scheduled for delivery next month, and the full order should be complete by early next year, with aircraft in service shortly after. The E3D Sentry will ensure that the RAF has a modern and effective capability for airborne early warning for the 1990s and beyond, and that it will be in a position to provide a full 40 per cent. of NATO's future AEW force.

Looking to the future, development of the new European fighter aircraft is continuing well. The radar and most other airframe equipments have been selected, and the first full-scale development engine is being tested. Construction of a prototype aircraft continues, and it is expected that that will fly next spring. Soon afterwards, we will need, in conjunction with our partners, to conduct a thorough review of progress during the development

programme, and to determine whether to proceed to the production phase. We expect to reach a decision at about the end of 1992.

We have also been addressing the future of the Tornado F3. The House will be aware that we have been considering the possibility of upgrading the aircraft's sensor and avionic systems. We shall continue to do so, and to place such a development in the context of our overall development of the RAF under the "Options" provisions.

Development of the second stage of the Foxhunter radar programme is scheduled to be completed later this year. Production of modification kits and their embodiment by the RAF will follow shortly thereafter. I am pleased to say that certain features of the second stage of the programme, together with other improvements, have already been introduced into those Tornado F3s deployed to the Gulf. I am now considering whether those further improvements should be added to the second stage of the radar programme and extended to the rest of the Tornado F3 fleet.

The modernisatioin of the tanker fleet continues. Work is now under way on the conversion of the 13 VC-10 aircraft to which I referred in last year's debate. I am pleased to report that the first phase of the Tristar conversion programme is complete, with six aircraft in service in a tanker role.

We have decided that the Bloodhound surface-to-air missile will be withdrawn from service this year, and that the force will be disbanded. Bloodhound is aging and increasingly ineffective in the face of modern electronic counter-measures, and it is no longer cost-effective to keep it in service. We are currently considering the requirement for medium surface-to-air missiles in the context of our overall air defence planning. We expect to seek proposals from industry shortly, and advance notice has been given to the defence industry in the MOD contracts bulletin.

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful to the Minister for repeating the evidence that I understand was given to the Select Committee. What will happen to the defence of our country between his deciding to get rid of Bloodhound and deciding whether he wishes to replace it?

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Bloodhound was not defending our country; it was defending a couple of United States air force bases. The effectiveness of Bloodhound has been diminishing steadily. It was introduced in 1964. "Obsolescent" is the kindest word that can be used to describe it. It was susceptible to every kind of electronic interference, and to withdraw it from service is exactly the sort of measure that can be regarded as entirely prudent and cost-effective.

Mr. O'Neill: If something which has been seen as obsolete for a long time and has been deployed defending targets which the Minister considers to be not particularly important—I may have cause to differ with him on that —why have we persisted with it for so long?

Mr. Clark: The House is used to the rapid change of footwork demonstrated by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). He often starts in the blue corner and then comes out of the red one. Having just reproached me for getting rid of the system too quickly, he now wants to know why we did not get rid of it sooner. That must mean that we are getting rid of it at exactly the right moment.

Mr. Mans: I am interested in what my right hon. Friend has said. As I understand it, that particular medium-range missile system is designed to defend most of East Anglia and the north-east coast. I also understand that the reason why it has been in service for so long is that the system that is adopted is very difficult to jam. While I realise that it is coming to the end of its operational life, will my right hon. Friend reconsider the situation that will pertain when the system leaves service at the end of the year?

Mr. Clark: I am entirely satisfied that, when the system leaves service, we will not find that our anti-aircraft defence is significantly degraded.

Finally, I must reiterate the outstanding contribution made by the RAF during the international effort to liberate Kuwait. Many RAF personnel are now involved not only in the immense task of recovering equipment from Kuwait and southern Iraq but also in the more pressing humanitarian effort currently under way in Turkey and northern Iraq. It is our intention that "Options for Change" will continue to ensure that the RAF is equipped and trained to perform the vital job we expect of it, which it carried out with such distinction in the Gulf conflict.

4.51 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I was somewhat surprised by the brevity of the Minister's peroration. However, given the content of his speech, I can understand that brevity.

It is no secret that the usual channels have been canvassing new arrangements for the discussion of defence matters in the House. The Opposition have had an open mind about the proposals for full day debates for each service. However, given the changed circumstances since 2 August, it is only right and proper that, this Session at least, we should devote a day to each of the services.

Besides those of us who take a close interest in defence matters, other hon. Members will want to reflect their own and their constituents' concern about the Gulf war, the role of the troops and the future procurement of equipment that will be required to fulfil the roles expected of them in the light of what Secretary of State James Baker, perhaps somewhat optimistically, described as the new world order. Therefore, it is all the more regrettable that this first service debate has been arranged for a day when so few hon. Members are in the Chamber. The reason for their absence is perfectly correct: they are working to support candidates in today's local government elections.

While it may be too early to expect the House to reach a definitive view on the lessons to be learnt from Operation Granby, I am sure that we all recognise the outstanding contribution of our troops, and in particular the work of the RAF in the air war. Before 15 January, some people doubted the effectiveness of air power, perhaps because of earlier experiences such as the failure in Vietnam and the overkill in Dresden and Coventry, to say nothing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Bomb damage assessment work was hampered during the Gulf war by poor weather. I hope that the studies will enable us to appreciate the full picture. We will be able to appreciate the full extent of civilian casualties and the impact of the bombing on a civilian infrastructure that was so closely linked to a military machine. We will be able to

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assess the balance between the damage inflicted by air attacks against that caused by advancing coalition ground forces.

We must also bear in mind the absence of any significant Iraqi air response and the sheer scale of the coalition forces. We must try to establish why the Iraqis chose not to fight. It is widely recognised that the Iraqi air force was the service least sympathetic towards Saddam. However, what prompted the air force to defect on such a massive scale?

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The history of Arab air forces since 1945 may have a lesson for the hon. Gentleman and others who question why they did not fight. The record of Arab air forces fighting during that period is pretty abysmal.

Mr. O'Neill: I know that the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) takes a close interest in all matters aeronautical. The actions of the Saudi air force in the recent conflict do not support his assertion. A number of the Iraqi troops enjoyed British training and some of the benefits of the experience of the people against whom they were ultimately ranged. That may be a factor, but remarks of that character verge on ethnic judgments of a rather dubious nature and they are better left unsaid.

The Opposition recognise the crisis of morale that seemed to emerge among the Iraqi troops. That contrasted with what I and other members of the Select Committee on Defence witnessed among RAF air crew and maintenance personnel in late November before the conflict. The young men we met were confident and adamant that they were ready to do what they had spent so much time training for. There was none of the exuberant and almost irresponsible gung-ho spirit that seemed to characterise some of their gallant predecessors during the Battle of Britain. The people I met and to whom I had an opportunity to speak out there could not but convince everyone of the seriousness of their intent, their professionalism and the cool and studied way in which they were preparing for what none of us appreciated were going to be such great risks.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The commander of the RAF base in my constituency was in charge of the Royal Air Force in the Gulf to which we all pay tribute. Is it not much more likely that the Iraqi pilots realised that the coalition's electronic surveillance systems were so superior that they risked being shot out of the sky because they did not have commensurate equipment? They had to save their planes and they made a wise decision.

In the same connection, later on in the conflict was it not necessary for the USAF and the other American parts of the coalition forces to show some restraint, bearing in mind that they had total command of the air, during the final Iraqi retreat when those unfortunate and regrettable incidents occurred in which the British were not involved?

Mr. O'Neill: As I was saying earlier, a number of studies are being carried out at the moment and I hope that some of the questions that I have raised will be answered. The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) must agree that our evidence at the moment is at best anecdotal.

In the last part of his intervention, the hon. Gentleman raised one of the most pressing aspects. We must recognise that those people who were returning to Iraq were returning in some semblance of military order and were doing so against the instructions from the United Nations. They were at least sailing very close to the wind against the undertakings into which their own people had entered. To say the least, they were taking considerable risks.

I am not saying that the bombing of defenceless convoys is in any way justifiable. However, I wonder how defenceless were some sections of that convoy. The record of some of those troops suggested that they had precious little concern for humanitarian matters when other pressures were upon them. We must strike a balance. At one stage there may well have been excesses. However, subject to the kind of pressures that the American authorities faced, they acted very quickly to restrain their troops and that certainly diminished some of the casualties. However, we have yet to decide: as the Americans would say, the jury is still out on a number of those questions. It is incumbent upon us not to provide answers, but to ask questions about the conduct of the war. In a debate such as this, which deals with the significance of air power, it is correct to do so.

I shall conclude my tribute to our forces. The men I met were professionals. They knew the odds far better than politicians or planners, yet they were ready to undertake the tasks that we now understand required incredible bravery and skill. Among all of the troops deployed in the Gulf, there was a sense of common purpose and dedication, which enabled each and every one of them to know what his individual contribution would be. It was significant that the individual contributions together were far greater than the sum of their parts. The whole world marvelled at the courage of the Tornado pilots who carried out the early bombing raids on Iraqi airfields.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside) *rose——*

Mr. O'Neill: If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a speech, I assure him that he will have plenty of time to do so this evening.

It was significant that those young pilots alone had the JP233 bombs. They had trained at low levels so that they could go in under enemy radar, rise, drop their bombs and then fly out at low levels through what has been described as a wall of lead created by AAA fire.

Does the Minister think it desirable that that sort of low flying should be repeated? I know that he touched on that in response to an earlier intervention. It may be premature to decide now whether a stand-off version of the JP233 weapon would be desirable. We all understand the danger in which we placed those young pilots, and appreciate the success of their work. It is fortunate that they did not need to persist with it. However, we must consider whether it is necessary to subject our troops to that sort of risk when it may be possible to develop a stand-off capability that could do the job at far less risk to our troops, and perhaps without requiring the amount of low-level flying practice now undertaken.

I am not a professional; I am simply asking a question. I know that some hon. Members are capable of answering it, and others would like to be capable of answering it. I am a Labour Member who would like an answer to that question. It may not be appropriate to have that answer today, but I want to place the matter on the agenda so that the Ministry of Defence can review it. It is not a matter of

party political contention; it is something about which we are all concerned. If we reduce the risk to our troops and diminish the need for at least some of the low-level flying practice that so bedevils so many of our constituents, we would be doing everyone a service.

It would be dangerous to try to draw immediate conclusions, but as politicians we shall obviously try to do so. The war was fought by a coalition massed against an enemy whose depth of resources was probably greater than we had anticipated. They had certainly been built up through the impoverishment of Hussein's own people, and he achieved a military and industrial complex on a scale unrivalled for a country of that size of population and wealth.

The experience of fighting against such an enemy in the desert, with the associated air action and relatively restricted naval and amphibious activity, may not be relevant to a rapidly changing and, we hope, diminishing threat from central Europe, but there are still lessons to be learnt. I hope that "Options for Change" and the White Paper will provide some of the answers as quickly as possible.

Confronted by the aftermath of war, we now face problems such as the plight of the Kurds and that of the Shi'ites in the south of Iraq. Is there not a case for expanding the role of our services in undertaking humanitarian disaster relief—whether the cause is man-made, as in Iraq, or natural, as in Bangladesh? The speed with which the coalition forces were assembled, the scale of the resources made available, and the single-mindedness of their deployment and application to their tasks in Operation Granby has shown what can be done. I do not think that this House or history will judge lightly those who fail to respond to equally pressing, if different, challenges elsewhere.

Part of the massive effort to deploy our troops and equipment required a great deal of what can only be called cannibalising, and there was much ingenuity and quick-footedness. Equipment was obtained and refurbished. I would not go so far as to say that it was begged, borrowed or stolen, but knowing the ingenuity of quartermasters, it was not far from that. What impact did the support operations in the Gulf have on RAF Germany? Was the cupboard left bare? Have the shelves been refilled? Do we really need to restore them to previous levels, given the diminishing threat from central Europe?

The consequence of the failure of the Iraqi air force to respond in any meaningful way was to reduce air-to-air contact. A number of our fighter aircraft thankfully did not have to confront the Iraqi air force in the way that had been anticipated. As a result, the role of the Tornado F3 was limited to the valuable task of providing cover for those engaged in bombing, reconnaissance and air refuelling missions.

On the latter activity, I want to join the Minister in praising the tanker fleet—one of the unsung heroes of the war. In many respects, it was the most vulnerable of all targets, given the nature of its cargoes, yet it stayed in the air 24 hours a day, week after week, from the very outset of the war. Certainly, the members of that fleet whom I met undertook what was demanded of them with remarkable tolerance and patience. Of course, there are other unsung heroes, such as the aircrew and the back-up support, both of which were absolutely superb throughout the war.

The lessons we must learn will take some time to emerge. I heard what the Minister said about the European fighter aircraft programme. Will he comment on suggestions in the press about certain stealth adaptations being made to EFA? The Opposition support the programme, but there is always the danger—I am loth to mix metaphors and talk about the stealthing of the aircraft and gold plating, but "gold plating" is the only expression that comes to mind—that that very important programme will be subject to continual changes of specification to achieve heights of capability that, quite frankly, we do not require. In an ideal world, they might be desirable, but at present they are neither affordable or necessary.

As the four partners involved in the EFA programme will now require fewer aircraft than was originally anticipated, the unit costs could rise and could be subject to close scrutiny. We do not wish to find unnecessary sources of increased pricing in the form of smart ideas from people who say, "Wouldn't it be nice if we had something else?" At the moment, even acquiring the EFA programme, which is necessary for this country's next generation of fighter aircraft, will strain our budgets.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that EFA already contains considerable stealth characteristics owing to the composite materials used in it and that its radar signature is considerably smaller than virtually that of any other present day combat aircraft?

Mr. O'Neill: I am aware of that, and it makes me even more concerned about some people's desire to make EFA even more stealthlike. Given what we think is necessary for the aircraft to fulfil its tasks, we do not think that it should, to mix metaphors, be gold-plated with extra stealth. We could end up with something that is far more expensive and unrealistic at a time when we are already under pressure. Both this Government and the next Labour Government will want to ensure that the success of the programme is not endangered in any way.

Mr. Colvin: In view of the success of the Tornado in the Gulf and our long-standing good relations with Saudi Arabia over supplying the Tornado, and given that the Tornado was sold on the back of the earlier Lightning's success, perhaps we should consider changing the name of the European fighter aircraft to make its name more acceptable to third countries outside the four-nation consortium that is building it. According to the evidence that I have received from the aerospace industry, there is no doubt that there is a lot of interest in that aircraft from other countries, especially those in the Gulf.

When the Minister of State was answering questions yesterday, many about EFA were fired at him and he batted a lot of them off, saying, "There will be plenty of time to discuss all this tomorrow in the defence debate." On reading the record, I noticed the suggestion that, if Germany decided to withdraw from EFA—there has been some suggestion that that is a possibility—the unit cost of the aircraft would increase. As far as I am aware, Germany's withdrawal would do exactly the opposite, because the costs of the German aerospace industry are higher than those of the British industry. Although Germany's withdrawal might mean goodbye to a certain number of German sales for EFA, it might also reduce the costs of that aircraft.

Mr. O'Neill: As we say in Scotland, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should "ca' canny" on that one. We are trying to keep Germany's involvement. The Minister's diplomatic skills and enthusiasm for Europe are well known. I understand that the initial order for 850 EFAs could drop to as low as 400 before the project is put in any jeopardy. I do not like to think that the German component might disappear for any reason. The dangers to future sales of Germany's withdrawal cannot be underestimated. An aircraft that does not enjoy the continued support of the four initial partners is not likely to prove attractive to other countries, regardless of its name.

Incidentally, if I have any query about EFA's name, it is that it is somewhat misleading because its defensive role is as significant as its offensive role. Indeed, if it had a different name, it might not have attracted quite the approbrium that it has in some sections of German society.

We look forward to continued progress with the EFA programme and recognise that the British dimension on radar is well founded. We know that the political situation in Germany is somewhat questionable at the moment, but given Germany's level of unemployment and the shakiness of Germany's overall economic position, I am sure that all sides of the Bundestag would feel hard pressed to oppose any idea of reducing or cutting such a major programme. I do not think that that is likely to happen.

In these debates we normally talk about EFA and Bloodhound, and another of our hardy annuals is the EH101 programme. Although yet another year has passed, the Minister's clear and unambiguous statement on the EH101 today was deafening in its silence. He chose not to refer to what should be a major order for a British helicopter or for a helicopter of any kind. I know that questions have sometimes been asked about the size of the EH101 and about whether we have the transport aircraft that are capable of moving it around the world to the places where we believe it should be deployed.

As a result of experiences in the Gulf, we know of the tremendous importance of helicopters, and the RAF needs to start making some decisions. If we have to consider transporting helicopters across the world at great speed, we should not discount the option that the Navy occasionally exercises, which is to take up civilian aircraft just as ships are taken from trade if our own aircraft cannot fulfil the transport function. The transportation problems of the EH101 are not, therefore, the central issue. As the Minister has responsibility for procurement, perhaps he will comment on what is happening about the EH101 and on how long the present paralysis in the MOD is likely to continue.

When the Minister mentioned Bloodhound, he chided me for questioning why he had decided to make the prudent decision on it. One of my hon. Friends has reminded me that last year the Minister chided the Opposition for asking questions about that because he said that we were being premature. Although a lot can happen in 14 or 15 months, the Minister cannot have it both ways. He has accused me of trying to have it both ways, but I am interested in what is going to happen over the next three or four years before there is any replacement, and in why a replacement was not sought earlier. The Minister is not to blame for all the mistakes of the past 12 years, but this matter was first planned 33 years ago and the officials in his office in the MOD have therefore had some warning about the likelihood of Bloodhound diminishing in importance. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that point in his reply.

There was some press speculation this morning about the possibility of the Government acquiring stand-off missiles. However, the Minister did not mention that in his speech. Perhaps he will bring us up to date later on what passes for the Government's thinking on this matter. Are the Government seeking to procure SRAM-T or are they looking at its French counterpart? Are the Government considering accepting American aircraft that are equipped with such weapons in this country? Do the Government think that it is necessary to replace the WE177 with anything or are they awaiting a future decision from NATO? Is this matter to be subject to NATO's consideration or is it a subject to be decided exclusively by the British Government?

This debate is normally held a little earlier in the year, but it is always held in advance of the White Paper. At the end of his speech, the Minister said that he hoped that the White Paper would provide us with some of the answers. Yesterday, the Secretary of State said that he hoped that the White Paper would be out before the summer recess, which meant that he was not certain that that would be the case. The right hon. Gentleman further hoped that "Options for Change" would be incorporated in that document. We all hope that, but the conditional way in which Ministers are now speaking suggests uncertainty.

I hope that the Minister will appreciate that, if the House is to be treated responsibly, we cannot be presented with a set of faits accompli. There must be a proper debate on a number of these issues if only to ensure that the Opposition have no grounds for charging the Government with dithering and prevarication. On several issues affecting both the Royal Air Force and other service procurement, we are not receiving any answers. We hear from industry that when people go to see the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister to make representations about their legitimate worries about future investment programmes and planning, they are told that they will have to wait and see.

In the past six months, many thousands of defence workers' jobs have been placed in jeopardy or disappeared. Those who remain are entitled to know what is happening. The people who served us so gallantly in the Gulf are entitled to know what will happen to them, where they will be based and what plans they can make for their children's education and for the future. No matter how committed the services are and how high their morale, the loyalty of personnel to their country is usually equalled by their responsibility to their families. Many of the men and women in the services have to take such considerations into account. At present, the Government's inability to give clear and specific answers to many questions is leading to plummeting morale, which is doing the defence of the country and the standing of the services no good.

Several problems face the Ministry of Defence. We know that next year there will be a cost overrun of £1·5 billion. It has been suggested that, on a long-term basis over the decade, the cost overrun will rise to some £21 billion. It is suggested that the money in the so-called peace dividend being sought by the Treasury is about £20 billion over the next six years.

There are 330,000 service personnel, 170,000 civil servants and 0·5 million defence workers looking for decisions. The fact that this is a motion for the

Adjournment of the House and that this is a poorly attended debate, for the reasons that I have already given, is no excuse for the Government to come to the House with so little to say and to broadcast such indecision around the country, whenever Government spokesmen have the opportunity.

This may be the first of the three service debates, but when we debate the future of the Army and the Navy, the Government must shape up and come out with far better answers than we were given tonight. We join with the Government in their justifiable pride and relief about the effectiveness of our troops in the war. We are with the Government and at one in supporting them. Now that the war is over and the services have proved their worth, the Government are not backing them as they should by giving answers to the legitimate questions that hon. Members on both sides of the House are asking and will continue to ask until we have either a new Government or a Minister who is prepared to play fair and straight with the troops.

5.22 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I begin with a note of agreement and understanding of the position of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) and his party about these debates. I fully understand what the hon. Gentleman said. He said that this year of all years was an opportunity that should not be missied to discuss individual services, because of the peculiar circumstances of the Gulf. However, I hope that he ackowledges with me that the move that I initiated three years ago, with the approval of the Defence Select Committee, to rationalise the debates should be responded to. It is not satisfactory for Back-Bench Members, the hon. Gentleman as Opposition spokesman or, indeed, Ministers, to have Ministers answer in their new roles in the old-style debates which were set up when we had service Ministers.

Before we come to the main set-piece, two-day defence debate of the year, it must be logical to have a debate on procurement, with both procurement Ministers present speaking to their briefs, and a debate on the armed forces so that the two armed forces Ministers—or one, if one of them happens to be in the Lords—and the Secretary of State can speak about personnel, operational and other matters.

That would mean that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement would not have to answer on the Royal Air Force with expert knowledge on the procurement side but with perhaps less than perfect command of detail on any personnel or armed forces matters, which are not his job. I hope that, when we come to this series of debates next year, an agreement will have been made between the usual channels to rationalise the debates in that way.

Our Committee was fortunate to make two visits to the Gulf, one before hostilities and one after. On both visits, we saw for ourselves the cardinal and crucial role of air power in operation Granby. In November, we were briefed at Muharraq on the capability and potential destructive power of the JP223, to which reference has been made. We heard at first hand how our Tornados and Jaguars would be deployed as part of the massive allied air effort. We also saw the work of the Royal Air Force tanker fleet and that of the transport forces. Indeed, on both visits we clocked up enough Hercules flying hours to last the rest of this Parliament.

At Dhahran, we spoke to the Tornado F3 air defence crews and at Al Muharraq we spoke to the ground crews and the Royal Air Force Regiment Rapier crews. We visited the hospital set up in the hospital building originally built by the RAF, and we had a chance to talk to all ranks in a memorable visit.

When we returned to Muharraq shortly after hostilities ended, we were fully briefed on the air campaign by those who had taken part in it. That was a privilege for which the Committee was grateful. The visit threw up several issues which need to be thought through. Few of us—alas, there are few of us here today—will ever forget the briefing we received from a Tornado pilot about the missions he had flown. That young man told us what he felt before, during and after the terrifying hours he had lived through. The impression of calm, cool professionalism in a man properly trained and superbly equipped with a machine in which he had full confidence will certainly stay with me for the rest of my life. It demonstrated the professionalism and adaptability of the Royal Air Force and the courage of all the crews undertaking sortie after sortie, many four or five hours long or more and against heavily defended targets.

Our Committee will take some oral evidence later this month from our air commander in the Gulf Air Vice-Marshal Wratten and some of those who served on his staff during hostilities. Undoubtedly, we shall draw some detailed lessons for the future. On this occasion, I am sure that all the members of my Committee would wish me to pay unstinting tribute to the magnificent performance of the RAF in the Gulf, which flew virtually every aircraft in its repertory from the oldest to the newest and the largest to the smallest. I pay our tribute to not only the fine air crew who lost their lives—to be added to that given so forcibly by my right hon. Friend the Minister—but to those who died in training before hostilities began. Let us note that the RAF is yet again involved in the area, with the Hercules and the Chinooks, which my right hon. Friend mentioned, some of which have come from RAF Odiham in my constituency.

It is almost a year since we heard evidence from the Ministry of Defence on the improved United Kingdom air defence ground environment. We published our report last November and the Government replied in February this year. They told us that progress had been encouraging and said:

> "Although in the light of the history of the project we must be cautious"—

those are well chosen words—

> "we are looking forward to future stages of the recovery programme with confidence."

That is good news. The House can only hope that the Government's confidence—the Committee also expressed guarded confidence about the way ahead—is justified in the event.

Perhaps it would be useful to rehearse some of the Committee's findings. The programme was designed to upgrade or replace the basic air defence radar system covering the United Kingdom—ground radars, the command and control system and the communications system—at a total cost of over £600 million at 1989 prices. Half of that would be paid for by NATO funds. NATO rules on procurement are less than perfect and regrettably, in order to qualify for funds, the normal development and

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risk reduction phases of a complex programme were omitted. That is one lesson which I hope has been well and truly learned.

A major problem has arisen over the computerised integrated command and control system—ICCS—and in particular over the data handling system software. As a result of those defects in the overall system, the formal acceptance by the RAF of the new system, due originally in early 1987, is now unlikely until the middle of 1992. There have been other reasons for the delay, but in broad terms we concluded that those software problems had delayed delivery by more than four years, with inevitable adverse operational implications for our air defences, although the existing system remains just technically viable.

The mention of software problems in debates such as this has a certain inevitability, and such problems are certainly familiar to our Committee. The Ministry has told us that, far from lagging behind the commercial world, it has played a leading role in establishing best practices. But the fact remains that one project after another has suffered software difficulties. That has applied to Nimrod, Ptarmigan, BATES, frigate command and control and the vertical-launched Sea Wolf. The list is endless.

We look forward to seeing how the new Ministry of Defence guidelines can improve matters. That is a major challenge facing Dr. McIntosh, the new chief of defence procurement, and I know, from conversations I have had with him, that he is well aware of it. I take this opportunity, on behalf of my Committee colleagues, to welcome him to his new task and wish him well in the years to come. If he can continue the reform of the procurement system with the verve and skill that Sir Peter Levene showed, he will be a great asset to the Ministry of Defence.

The report and the Government's reply raised a number of other issues. Without going into them now, I draw the attention of the House to paragraphs 60 to 67 on the delays in delivering fairly standard mobile radars off the shelf, which I fear reflect only too clearly the aura of delay which still hangs over too much of procurement.

There is a sense of anxiety lest, in the understandable euphoria following the magnificent performance by the RAF in the Gulf, we overlook the history of the air defence procurement problems of the recent past. One thinks of Nimrod, Foxhunter, now IUKADGE, the Bloodhound replacement, and so on. On a more optimistic note, I believe that the systems, once completed, will be first-class; I am delighted that our AWACS aircraft are now being delivered, and I have been glad to read the reports of the performance of the F3 in the Gulf.

As for the options for change as they affect the RAF, the Committee asked that the transcript of the evidence that we heard last week from the RAF should be tagged as relevant to the debate, together with some written answers that we received from the Ministry on detailed matters. We shall report to the House as soon as we can, but I cannot anticipate our conclusions. Meanwhile, those two documents are in the Library, and at this stage I shall simply draw the attention of the House to a few broad issues that arise.

The first is, roughly speaking, the halving of RAF Germany and the major task that follows that of shuffling around the personnel and aircraft so as to ensure that the people, who are the RAF's most valuable asset, are not so messed about that they want to leave the service.

As a result, we can expect major changes in the support area in the United Kingdom, possibly comparable with what is in the wind in terms of naval support, which is causing enough controversy. Stations must be closed, there will be increasing contractorisation and so on. Those are all issues which I hope the Ministry of Defence is addressing urgently and cogently.

It is important that we leave bases in Germany with dignity and decency. There seems to be the prospect of some unseemly squabbling about financial arrangements as we vacate bases, as our claims for the value of improvements made are met by German claims on dilapidation and pollution. That will in due course also apply to military bases, workshops and so on. After almost half a century of British protective presence in Germany, I hope that our departure, initially from Gutersloh and Wildenrath, will be properly conducted.

Arising out of that is the need to recognise that all deep-seated assumptions must be questioned. In that context, we must ask why we need to keep Harriers in north-west Germany, practically on the Dutch-German border, and why, in particular, we need them there. The same questions must be asked about the remaining Tornado squadrons. Where now are their targets in NATO's war planning, and is Brugge the best place for them? All such questions are thrown up by the dramatic changes that have taken and are taking place.

Speaking for myself, I am concerned that we still do not have a coherent strategy for the way forward for our services; that applies particularly, in the context of today's debate, to the Royal Air Force. We have made reductions, which may be right, sensible and necessary. But to enable the Government to justify them fully in strategic terms, we must be told what the Government's strategic plans are for the defence of Europe in the future.

Do they know? I cannot believe they do. "Options for Change" was published without consulting our NATO allies. They have been consulted, we are told, ever since, but if we cannot, in the new scene in which we find ourselves in Europe, come to a collective conclusion about the task, how can we, having always been in the forefront as one of the leading nations in contributing to NATO's defence, be sure that the changes that we are now making will enable us to continue to play as constructive and leading a role?

I am not arguing that the changes that we have made in bringing home the Tornado squadrons is wrong. I cannot do that but, by the same token, I do not see how the Government can argue that it is right until they can tell us that there is a new NATO strategy and that the European Governments have together come to terms with the new risks, with how they must be matched, and with how we shall ensure stability in the new Europe. Only then can we know which nation shall carry out which task in support of what part of that endeavour.

I say that in the context of the RAF because this is an RAF debate, but the same applies right across the spectrum. My fear is that we shall, for financial reasons —we are all under pressure to reduce budgets—take piecemeal decisions across the services, which will mean that, in the end, when we have reached collective conclusions about how best to secure the stability in the new Europe, we shall say, "We are sorry. We should like

to have done that, but now we do not have the correct mix or balance of forces with which to make that contribution."

It is for NATO to mount the new strategy. It is for the NATO Council—not necessarily for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary but for the Foreign Ministers and Prime Ministers and Heads of Government collectively—to decide what we shall provide by way of a European insurance policy to defend our future economic interests, which are the stability of the whole region of Europe. When we have done that, it will be for the various Governments collectively to decide how best we can contribute, and we can make a much better contribution in certain areas of defence than we can in others. I shall not go into those, because this is a more narrowly focused debate. At that time, and only then, shall we be able to say, "That is the balance of forces we need."

We shall then be able to say that not just for one task but so that we can respond to contingencies that may arise but which cannot now be anticipated. Kuwait and the Falklands are the two latest examples, but such contingencies are always happening. In the past we have always been able to cope. The RAF has been able to make its contribution not because we had plans for a contingency but because the commitment to NATO was at such a level that we knew that we could strip it and attend to whatever emergency arose.

That is the way in which we have coped. Indeed, hon. Members may recall with surprise that we could not have coped with the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland in 1969 if we had not denuded the Rhine Army, enabling us to send reinforcements to protect the Catholic minority. That was how the whole thing started there. I was part of the planning process when blocks of soldiers were removed from Germany and sent to Northern Ireland. We knew that, if hostilities broke out or there was a period of tension, they could be sent back.

The same occurred at the time of the Falklands, and it was certainly true of the Gulf. One need only consider the position of RAF Germany in the Rhine Army in the last six months to see what had to be sacrificed there so that we could make the contribution that we made. However, that will not be the case in the future. With the inevitably smaller forces that we shall possess, we shall have to plan specifically how, whether and, if so, in what measure we shall respond to out-of-area events.

Will my right hon. Friend the Minister propose, in the very near future, a coherent, strategic plan? I know that he has a major struggle, battling against the Treasury, the services, and people like me who urge him to produce a coherent plan. "Options for Change" is not yet an answer to our problem but merely some suggestions. We need an answer urgently, so that we can plan for the future defence expenditure to which we shall commit ourselves.

Most important of all, it will allow us to thank our services for their magnificent performance in the Gulf and to say, "This is your future. You may be smaller, but this is where you are going, that is what we want you to do, and this is what we shall provide for you to carry out that coherent, strategic task." That is the way to earn the gratitude of our services. The way to earn their distrust is to continue to make piecemeal cuts because of Treasury drives, without being able to inform them of that comprehensive strategic plan.

5.40 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): In the nature of events, I frequently find myself following the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), but I find increasingly that I sympathise with his opinions. The last passage of his speech, in which he said that he was speaking for himself, was extremely powerful and will strike a chord on both sides of the House.

That most urbane of American politicians, Mo Udall from Arizona, once said, after two days at a convention of the Democratic party, of which he was a distinguished member, that the problem was that

"everything has been said but not everyone has said it."

The way in which that quote may appear to affect this debate should not be dispelled, because the importance of the issues before us is such that many topics need to be emphasised and underlined and they should be the subject of contributions from more than one Member of the House.

I add my tribute to the men of the Royal Air Force of all ranks who served, in all capacities, in the course of the hostilities in the Gulf—[HON. MEMBERS: "And women."]—and the women too.

Like the hon. Members for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) and for East Hampshire, I had the good fortune to visit the forces toward the end of last November. It was the occasion of the visit of the Select Committee on Defence, and the hon. Member for Clackmannan and I were made temporary honorary members of the Committee for the purpose of the visit. We were welcomed by the Chairman and enabled to obtain first-hand impressions of the state of readiness of our troops in a way that could not have been conveyed by word of mouth.

In Dhahran and Muharraq, one could not help but be impressed, not by the demonstrative nature of the men of the RAF but rather by the quiet and undemonstrative—even matter-of-fact—way in which they contemplated the tasks before them. Those tasks involved high risks and demanded skills of the highest order.

I hope that the House will understand if I pay tribute to 43 squadron of the RAF, normally based at RAF Leuchars in my constituency, which served with great distinction in the Gulf hostilities.

Another group of people who made, indirectly, a substantial contribution to our effort in the Gulf are the wives of those who were serving there. My wife and I visited at RAF Leuchars a group of those wives whose husbands were serving in the Gulf. It would be wrong to describe those ladies as plaster saints, but they possessed extraordinary common sense and good humour. I left feeling inspired by their understanding of what their husbands were engaged in, and their commitment to ensuring that the tasks to which their husbands had set their hand were successfully carried through. However, even that robust commons sense could not disguise the strain that many of them clearly felt at the conversion—at least for them—of peace into wartime.

One lady told me that, when her husband left for the Gulf, she had to explain to her employer that during Christmas school holidays it would be impossible for her to continue to work because she would have to look after her school-aged children. The employer's response was that his business could not cope with that, so he would have to dismiss her. Clearly, that family suffered a substantial loss, which was irrecoverable under any of the

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schemes available to meet the costs incurred by those sent to the Gulf. It was a financial sacrifice that may have made it even more difficult to sustain the emotional sacrifice which separation from her husband obviously imposed.

As we approach this debate, we do so against the background—as the hon. Member for East Hampshire so forcefully reminded us—of the unresolved issues raised by the publication of "Options for Change". All parties in the House are now committed to reductions in defence expenditure in different ways, at different levels and over different periods. However, when we made that commitment, we did so on the basis of a number of assumptions.

First, we assumed that the conventional forces in Europe treaty would be signed, ratified and observed in spirit and in letter. Secondly, we assumed that the reduction in tension between east and west would continue. Thirdly, we asumed that the Soviet Union would proceed in an orderly way along the path of reform. Fourthly, we assumed—perhaps a negative assumption—that it was unlikely that the United Kingdom forces would be engaged in serious operations in the foreseeable future, other than in defence of our own territorial integrity. All four of those assumptions have been proved, to a greater or lesser extent, to be optimistic. The first three may yet be achieved, but the fourth has proved unjustified.

A passage in the evidence of the Select Committee, in which the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) asked questions of some of those giving evidence, reflects the suspicion on both sides of the House that the Government's proposals enshrined in "Options for Change" are Treasury-driven. If that is so, it must be a substantially illegitimate way in which to proceed.

The proper approach to such matters must be found in a series of questions. First, what is the nature of the threat that the United Kingdom faces, actually or prospectively? Secondly, what is the nature of our responsibilities to our allies and others? Thirdly, what is needed to meet the first of those and to discharge the second, in terms of manpower and equipment? Fourthly, and perhaps most comprehensively, what financial resources are necessary to provide the manpower and equipment to meet the threat and discharge those responsibilities?

I cannot see how the first and second of those questions can be answered until we have a clearer view of the Soviet Union's fate, until the NATO review has been completed, and until there is a long-term view of the stability of the middle east. If we cannot answer the first two questions, plainly we should not address questions three and four.

I would not fault Ministers for caution in the matter, although I fault the Government for unnecessary secrecy. The passage of arms between the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence and a witness on 24 April may well pass into the history of Whitehall. It resulted in the Chairman being able to substantiate the point that he was making by reference to what he had been told in the NAAFI, but he was told by the witness that, although the Chairman might tell the public anything he liked, the witness could not confirm or deny it. It was a most extraordinary exchange. I wonder whether it is in the national interest to have such secrecy, which only encourages suspicion. In the context of the matters under discussion, it seems much more likely that such secrecy will also encourage partisanship.

It is the duty of Opposition parties, no less in defence than any other sphere, to subject the Government to scrutiny. We had an interesting illustration of that a moment or two ago, in the exchange between the Minister of State and the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on the Bloodhound missile. The Minister of State gave a most interesting answer. He said that the withdrawal of the missile would not cause our air defence to be degraded. We must put that answer in the context of what he had previously been saying—that for some time the missile had been making no contribution to our air defence. He was effectively saying that, if we got rid of something that was making no contribution, it would not affect the total contribution.

The Minister of State did not address the issue of the gap and how it would be filled—I do not think that the hon. Member for Clackmannan pressed it as hard as he might. Will there be a replacement? If there is, is that not because there is a perceived need for one?

Mr. Alan Clark: There is no gap.

Mr. Campbell: The Minister says from a sedentary position that there is not a gap, but my reading of the evidence taken before the Defence Select Committee suggests that there was such a gap.

During the hostilities in the Gulf, the Opposition fulfilled their responsibility for scrutinising the Government's policy. But there was such a broad consensus that hon. Members were able, with some honourable exceptions, to unite around the main thrust of Government policy, supported by the United Nations resolutions. I suspect that there is at present in the House greater unanimity on defence matters than there has been for some time. As we move to a series of decisions of great significance, wold there not be a better chance of reaching the right decisions, if the Government were to take the House more fully into their confidence? The answer to that question is incontrovertibly in the affirmative.

Before turning to some of the longer-term issues, I shall mention two matters of more immediate, almost domestic, concern. They arise out of the existence of RAF Leuchars in my constituency. The issue of low flying is frequently brought before the House in tones of outrage, frustration and even alarm by hon. Members on behalf of their constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) raised such a case this week. However, in a constituency such as mine where there is an operational base, low flying of a different sort occurs that causes no less inconvenience. That is especially the case when, as recently, the operational conversion unit has been engaged to replace Phantoms with Tornados.

Ministers have shown commendable alacrity in consenting to my request to institute a noise survey to establish whether there is a different footprint of noise from the Tornados and, if so, whether additional properties may be elligible for insulation grants. The result of that survey is expected in June. I hope that if, as I suspect, that survey reveals that there are properties that now fall within the footprint, resources will be made available to provide insulation.

It is incumbent on me to draw attention to the fact that two primary schools within the immediate vicinity of RAF

Leuchars—at Leuchars and at Guardbridge—frequently suffer disturbance because of ordinary operations at the base. So far, the Ministry of Defence and Fife regional council have been unable to resolve that problem. I hope that some sympathetic consideration will be brought to bear on that issue.

Ministers may also recall the robust campaign mounted in my constituency and the surrounding district against the proposal to withdraw search and rescue operations from RAF Leuchars. That campaign was only partially successful, as the ultimate decision was to restrict operations to daylight hours only. However, those involved, some of whom are present now, were well satisfied with persuading the Ministry of Defence that the capability at RAF Leuchars should be maintained.

Recently, the Secretary of State was civil enough to tell me that the Ministry of Defence has received an unsolicited bid for the contractorisation of part of search and rescue operations. He said that that bid was to be examined by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in due course. I urge the Government not be seduced by any short-term financial gain that they think they may achieve by the contractorisation of those essential services. In putting the matter thus, I express no disrespect to those who operate civilian search and rescue services. Aircraft based at Stornoway and Sumburgh fulfil their responsibilities in a capable and professional way. That is hardly surprising, as I understand that they are crewed almost entirely by former RAF pilots.

The military search and rescue requirement is best met by dedicated personnel and equipment. There may be a role for reserves, but that can only be supplementary to the principal capability. I think it has already been drawn to Ministers' attention that dependence on contract, rather than on the relationship of those who serve the Crown, in circumstances where the provision of search and rescue is required, can be subject to industrial dispute. The services are emergency services which, by their very nature, are required to be on call 24 hours a day. I hope that the Government will accept that the present arrangement, as a consequence of which the military component is kept well honed and extremely effective, is one that they will be willing to continue to support.

Mr. Bill Walker: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way and for his earlier comments about the assistance that he has received. Will he remind Ministers that civilian pilots cannot be posted in times of emergency to areas of need? Surely, one of the lessons to have come out of the Gulf is that we were able to deploy personnel because they were there, trained and able to go out and perform the job immediately. That cannot be accomplished by civilian personnel.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, because it underlines my next point—that existing arrangements are well established and have an integrated place in the overall activities of the Royal Air Force. The attempt to add civilians, no matter how qualified or willing, inevitably seems likely to cause difficulties, especially in times of hostilities.

It is true that, if military operations were discontinued, that might produce a pool of trained personnel. However, that pool would eventually be exhausted and, if private training were required to be part of the civilian undertaking for search and rescue, the ultimate cost to the Ministry of Defence might be greater. Ministers should not discount the important contribution to service morale made by the fact that search and rescue is firmly based in the service itself. Nor should we underestimate the contribution to civilian morale of what is sometimes described as the friendly yellow helicopter coming quickly into view—a constant reminder of the professionalism of the Royal Air Force.

There is a great deal of affection for the Wessex, some of which are nearly 30 years old; but the Sea King has an enhanced capability, and the arguments in favour of search and rescue are only underlined by the move from the Wessex to the Sea King—a possibility to which I hope the Government will give serious consideration, since it would enhance search and rescue capability.

I share the concern of others about the fact that the rate of attrition of the Tornado GR1 in the Gulf hostilities was relatively high. I know that a number of explanations for that are being traded in defence circles. I appreciate that it would be quite wrong to invite the Minister to confirm or deny any of those on an occasion such as this. As he properly said, the Ministry is engaged in a detailed analysis of the lessons that must be learned. It appears to be being claimed that only one loss occurred while the JP233 was being delivered, and that other weapons were being delivered during four other losses. I hope that, during the Ministry's analysis, careful consideration will be given to establishing the facts and to the lessons to be learned.

I observe that the Secretary of State told the Defence Select Committee in evidence that the United States was anxious that we should provide the JP233, which represented a capacity that that country did not possess. We know that delivering the weapon requires the aircraft to fly very low and that, as a consequence, they may be exposed to anti-aircraft artillery, to which they would not be exposed if they were operating at medium or high level.

It is being claimed also that RAF tactics changed after the first week. I hope that, if they were changed, the reasons for that change will be clearly understood and that the lessons from it will be learned.

We must ask ourselves whether the achievement of the delivery of the JP233 justifies the risks of that delivery. We have already heard of the possibility of a stand-off weapon to fulfil the same task—I understand that the United States wants to achieve that. If it is possible to achieve the same effect with a stand-off weapon involving less risk to men or aircraft, that is desirable.

Hon. Members have also mentioned the European fighter aircraft. I am more and more convinced of the need for it and for the continued participation of the United Kingdom in the project through to production. The issue was raised at defence questions earlier this week, when the Minister of State, with characteristic bravura, swept aside all doubts about German participation.

We have to be careful about this Minister; he brings a certain intellectual raffishness to our proceedings, but we must not allow the style to obscure the substance. We cannot ignore the fact that there has been a reduction in the German requirement; or that a working party composed of the CDU, the CSU and the FDP—the parties that form the German coalition Government—has been set up to evaluate whether the EFA is the best option for the Luftwaffe. It will be some time before it reaches any conclusion and it is believed to be considering the Mig 29, among other options, as an alternative.

[Mr. Campbell]

We know that the EFA could fulfil a number of roles for the United Kingdom. In particular, it can provide a quality of agility which the F3 version of the Tornado was not designed to provide. What if Germany were to withdraw? Would the production phase continue to be viable; what would the unit costs of each aircraft be? If fewer aircraft were constructed, it is likely that the unit costs will rise, not fall—not least because all the expenditure on research and development would have to be allocated to a smaller number of aircraft.

Mr. Mates: Perhaps I can help the hon. and learned Gentleman. I put this very question to British Aerospace when I was becoming more worried about German withdrawal. British Aerospace advised the Committee that a German pull-out would make the project marginally cheaper, because all the research and development costs have already been allotted between the countries and will have been paid for. The problem is that German labour costs are higher than those of any other country, so without those labour costs forcing the prices up, there will be a small reduction in costs—strange as that may seem.

Mr. Campbell: I well understand the difference between the labour costs in the United Kingdom and in Germany, and I accept that the hon. Gentleman has pursued this matter a little more fully than I have. But in normal circumstances, it would be surprising to find a reduction in unit costs following a reduction in the total number of aircraft produced.

I remain unconvinced by the Government's case for a tactical air-to-surface missile. It appears that the SRAM-T is by no means certain to continue; and that reservations about that have been expressed in the United States. We know that there is a French equivalent which the Government might be able to employ. I believe that there is almost certainly a case for NATO deploying the weapon, but it is hard to justify a United Kingdom need to acquire the capability, especially at a time when we are told that the budget of the MOD is likely to be under siege.

I hope that the Government will seriously consider the political consequences of the deployment of a tactical air-to-surface missile and take serious account of the proposition that, if it were deployed in Europe, it could be deployed only at a time of crisis, being stored under normal circumstances in the United States. The people of Germany will have strong views about this sensitive subject, so I hope that, if the Government remain confirmed in the belief that a tactical air-to-surface missile is necessary, they will take account of the political sensitivities that the issue raises.

There is no question but that we have achieved considerable success as part of the allied effort in the hostilities in the Gulf, in which the Royal Air Force played a full and admirable part. Success, however, should not blind us to the need for careful analysis of performance of men and equipment. In a curious way it is easier to be self-critical after having lost or done badly. The history of warfare knows many examples of the losers learning from a battle but the victors failing to. I earnestly hope that we shall not fall into that trap.

6.8 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I am glad that the Minister of State began his speech with a warm tribute to the Royal Air Force and the gallant part that it played in the successful outcome of the Gulf war. For those of us who sat in this House during those days, it was a humbling experience. I thought that our role contrasted dramatically with that of the air crew and the ground crew in the front line. I am pleased that I was not called to speak in the Gulf debates.

During the hostilities, I put a question to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and expressed the hope that we would not leave the job half done. Militarily, we certainly did not, and the conflict was a classic example of how air power properly applied can be the crucial determinant in modern war. It can also be said that, if air power had been deployed earlier, Saddam Hussein could have been deterred from his aggression. The Royal Air Force did just that vis-a-vis Iraq and the protection of Kuwait in 1961. Even after Kuwait was absorbed into Iraq by naked force, the rapid deployment of allied aircraft ensured the protection of Saudi Arabia.

In the Gulf conflict, Royal Air Force personnel showed courage, stamina and above all adaptability. An example of that was seen about halfway through the conflict, when air supremacy had been obtained, in the precision bombing of bridges, communication links and other key targets. It could be achieved only by the use of intelligent munitions.

As our Tornados did not, and still do not yet have laser designators, Buccaneers, which are normally employed in a maritime attack role, were sent at short notice from Lossiemouth to designate the targets. Tornados equipped with Paveway laser-guided bombs were then able to hit those targets from medium altitude, a tactic that they were not normally trained to carry out. The policy of using the most experienced crews for the job and forming composite squadrons meant that the necessary adaptability was successfully achieved.

Tribute has rightly been paid to the transport and Nimrod forces, and I should like especially to mention the Jaguar. It is reckoned to be an aging aeroplane, but those who worked on it and served with it knew that it could carry a heavy load a long way and that it was an effective close support aircraft. This proved to be the case, both with the French air force and the Royal Air Force in the Gulf, and our composite Jaguar squadron performed exceptionally well, fortunately without loss.

I regret that my right hon. Friend the Minister did not stress more strongly the importance of maintaining a strong defence industrial base in the United Kingdom, as that is of strategic interest to our services and of vital economic interest to our people, not least during a recession. Many questions were left unanswered but I am sure that, in the winding-up speech, some answers will be provided. I was told by the previous Secretary of State for Defence that the EH101 helicopter was to be the utility helicopter for the RAF. Now we have absolutely no idea of the helicopter that will be used for medium lift. We also know that the Wessex and ultimately the Puma will need to be replaced. The Nimrods on maritime patrol cannot continue ad infinitum, and a new maritime patrol aeroplane will have to be procured. The need for a medium level SAM to replace Bloodhound has already been mentioned in the debate.

The Minister begged more questions than he answered when he spoke about the future of the F3 Tornado in air defence. He speculated about whether there would be a mid-life update. We also know that the aircraft has some structural fatigue problems that need to be addressed. We must hear more about how the aircraft will fit into the overall air defence of this country in the medium term.

The Minister again adopted the interrogative mode when speaking about the European fighter aircraft in the medium and longer term. The aeroplane is the essential backbone of the RAF air defence of the future, and will also be essential for close air support. It will be a highly flexible, versatile aircraft, and if the Minister has doubts about it, he should at least spell out the alternatives.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have no doubts.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am glad to hear that, because it resolves much of my uncertainty. I hope that it reassures the House.

During the Gulf war, the transport force was utilised at an exceptionally demanding rate. One wonders how this has affected the overall airframe life of the C130 which was getting a bit long in the tooth anyway. What are the medium-term plans for updating the transport force of C130s and VC10s?

Some hon. Members mentioned the tactical air-to-surface missile and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) spoke about it at some length. A stand off nuclear capability for the RAF is important as part of the maintenance of a graduated deterrent by the United Kingdom. Unlike the Government, I believe that we shall need an intelligent anti-armour weapon with some stand-off capability. This has been cancelled for the time being. It is not wise to put the GR5 and GR7 Harriers into service without such a weapon, and the Jaguar and, ultimately, the European fighter aircraft will also need it. I do not wish to weary the House with these detailed points.

Mr. Alan Clark: As always, I am listening with tremendous interest to my hon. Friend's catalogue. I shall give a detailed reply in my winding-up speech. I have been adding up my hon. Friend's shopping list, and I have calculated that he is advising expenditure of between £15 billion and £18 billion. My hon. Friend speaks with great sincerity and there is a good case for all that he recommends, but his speech demonstrates the immense difficulty, even if one had constant budget levels, of apportioning expenditure to the three services.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, because his intervention enables me to curtail my speech. He has made several of the points that I had intended to make.

Important equipment decisions will need to be taken in the fairly short term. It is all very well to have options for change, but to maintain morale the services require some early decisions. I hope that the process of decision making will be advanced, so that we may have a proper debate on the defence review, because defence review it is although the Government have always been coy about using the phrase. During the 1980s, I wrote books about the need for a review and was ridiculed for doing so.

The problem of resources confronted by the Government is a real one, and they have at least made clear the kind of service that they want. I am glad that they have done so. The Minister said that he wished the Royal Air Force to be a balanced force able to react to the needs of the 1990s and beyond. If it is to be a balanced force, it will have to be equipped with weapon systems of the type that I have outlined. They are weapons which are needed across the spectrum of capability.

If we have a lack of resources, I hope that at least there is no lack of intellectual investment in defence. The problem is that, over recent years, there has been all too little. We all knew that the issue of British forces in Germany would come to a head before too long. We all recognised that the defence procurement budget was growing beyond the rate of inflation and beyond the sustainability of long-term budgets, and that something had to be done. I believe that the solution lies in radical manpower policies.

In the past, we could rely on a virtually all-professional force but, as the Minister explained so eloquently in his speech, the Royal Air Force in the Gulf war needed to mobilise the Royal Auxiliary Air Force aero-medical and air movement squadrons, and needed the help of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve intelligence and meteorological specialists. The United States Air Force, which bore the brunt of the conflict, could not have won the war without the air transport force, half of which was reservist. Without the significant contribution made to the conflict on operations by the Air National Guard, for example, the New York Air National Guard flying F-16s, and the Alabama Air National Guard flying F-4s on Wild Weasel defence suppression missions, the war might not have been won.

I believe that we can sensibly reduce the regular element if we compensate with an increase in reserves. Reserves need to be paid only when they are training. They do not need pensions or married quarters. They make a contribution to the civil community through their full-time jobs. The concomitant to that is giving a good career to the regulars and investing in training. I am a little perplexed that the Royal Air Force, however, should be moving away from apprentice training at Halton and should have done away with cadet training at Cranwell. The experience of air forces in all other countries of the developed world has led them to put more rather than less emphasis on training for the regulars.

I am confident that the Royal Air Force will have a key part to play in our defence in future. It may be much less orientated towards a static presence on the continent of Europe, but the inherent flexibility and mobility of air power will be indispensable to the United Kingdom.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I endorse everything that has been said in tribute to the men and women of the Royal Air Force for their extraordinary performance in the Gulf war. Like other members of the Select Committee on Defence, I had the extraordinary good fortune to visit our forces in the Gulf on two occasions, first, at the end of November and, secondly, in mid-March. On the first occasion I found that many of the men and women to whom I talked were apprehensive about the future, hoping that Kuwait could be freed without the need for military action, but determined that, if it became necessary, they would do the job that they had joined to do, to the best of their ability and in a way which would make the people at home proud of them. That is exactly what they did.

[Mr. John Cartwright]

When I went back to meet service men and women the second time, I found them relieved that the war was over, with so few casualties. They were quietly pleased that they had done the job they set out to do so swiftly and efficiently, although they were sad that they had lost some good friends. My experience of those two visits underlines the view that I have always had when I meet members of our armed forces—that we have every right to be proud not just of their courage and determination but of their sheer professionalism.

On the first occasion when we met commanders in the Gulf, those who were with me may recall that the people in command of the Royal Air Force, undoubtedly aware of the resources at their disposal, were bullish about the prospects. They took the view that it was at least possible that, after a period of sustained attack from the air, the Iraqi forces would be likely to crack. The Army, predictably, were much more sceptical and took the view that territory could be reclaimed only through the use of forces on the ground.

When we went back for the second visit, there was no real dispute that the extraordinary success of the land war had been due largely to the sheer erosion of the Iraqi ability to fight as a result of the sustained air attack. *Jane's Defence Weekly* of 6 April analysed the position and summed it up effectively when it said:

"The objectives of the coalition ground assault were achieved with incredibly low casualty figures. It was airpower that made this imbalance of damage possible, because airpower alone could attack every part of the Iraqi military —every one of the 500,000 troops, every factory, every ammunition dump, and every vehicle—while putting only a few hundred coalition aircraft and their crews at risk."

That underlines the absolutely essential element of air supremacy in modern warfare. It is doubtful whether any army in the world could have stood up to the technologically based air bombardment which was directed against the Iraqis. That is one lesson that we learned from the Gulf war.

The second lesson, which has been touched on already in the debate, is the fact that smart munitions on the whole worked extremely well. We saw some of the videos on television. Those of us who visited the forces afterwards were shown more examples of the incredible accuracy of some of the systems. We have been talking for 20 to 25 years of emerging technologies on the battlefield; in the light of the Gulf war it is obvious that they are here to stay. We must also recognise that more and more nations are acquiring the capabilities of electronic warfare. It is an expensive process, only partially offset by the lower manpower levels involved, but there is no alternative to going down that costly path if the RAF is to maintain the capacity to fight an effective conventional war.

I also endorse what was said earlier about the importance of stand-off weapons systems. It is right to try to learn the lesson of the Gulf war in terms of the review of "Options for Change" and the mapping out of the way forward for our armed forces in a different environment. I strongly endorse the comments of the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, on the cuts. They were hardly options; they were firm and clear cuts because options were not offered to anybody. If one offers options, there are choices. These were not choices but straightforward cuts.

It is a matter for concern that the cuts were imposed without discussion with NATO. NATO was told about them afterwards, but there was no consultation beforehand. That is sad and strange. I recall, as I am sure other right hon. and hon. Members do, the criticism directed against some of our NATO allies when they, for what they regarded as sound financial reasons, reduced their defence expenditure and cut their defence contributions. It is strange that we should have done exactly the same as we have condemned others for doing in the past.

As we consider the size and shape of British forces for the future, there is widespread acceptance of the need for much more flexible and mobile forces, able to adapt to changing circumstances and sudden emergencies. The chief of the air staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding, told the Royal Aeronautical Society recently that the overall direction of the RAF in the 21st century had to be towards a multi-role capability. He said:

"We must not invest very large sums of money in equipment and capabilities that are highly specialised, which are specific to one scenario."

That is sound advice. I am glad to be reassured that the European fighter aircraft will adhere to the multi-role philosophy and that it will fulfil all the roles of the Tornado. Certainly, it will be able to undertake a substantial number of differing roles.

I share the concern of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, about the security of the German involvement in this programme because, like him, I read with interest that the Germans are now evaluating six potential alternatives to the European fighter aircraft. We know that they have reduced their declared uptake. The United Kingdom is now committed to taking 250 aircraft out of a total of 675, and although we may argue as to whether unit costs will be increased or decreased if the Germans pull out, German withdrawal from the programme would certainly create difficulties.

That is something that the Select Committee on Defence explored with Ministry of Defence officials at our meeting last week. It asked a direct question and the official appearing before it said:

"If Germany did not go ahead with the production phase at all it most certainly would have implications for Britain and, we would have to consider our position at that stage."

That seems to be a classic civil service formula for the fact that there would be difficulties if Germany pulled out. All that I am saying at this stage is that I hope the Government have some fallback position to guard against that eventuality.

Turning to the role of the RAF in relation to nuclear weapons, I am one of those who believe that nuclear weapons have a role in the defence of Europe for as far ahead as we can see. The obvious threat from the Soviet Union may have diminished, although we may argue among ourselves how far it has diminished. However, we have to accept that there is very great uncertainty about the future state and condition of the Soviet Union. For example, if the Soviet Union were to break up into its constituent parts, all of us would have some fears about what might happen to the nuclear weapon arsenal which it now has. We must also recognise the risks of nuclear proliferation in third nations, which are a constant matter of concern.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, at the London summit last July, heralded a new strategy of making nuclear weapons truly weapons of last resort. But

it also made it clear that nuclear weapons will continue to play a central role in the overall strategy of the alliance for the prevention of war. While nuclear weapons remain a vital part of NATO strategy they must be credible, effective, responsive and survivable. There must be a mix of systems and a range of options open to alliance Governments, and that means that at a certain point nuclear modernisation has to be undertaken. There is no point in clinging to nuclear systems that are outdated or ineffective.

In my view, in the foreseeable future there will be a growing gap in NATO's sub-strategic nuclear arsenal. The Pershings and the ground-launched cruise missiles are being removed as a result of the INF treaty. The Lance missiles are obsolescent and are not to be replaced, and I welcome and support that decision. Nuclear artillery is likely to be withdrawn as a result of the result of the short-range nuclear negotiations with the Soviet Union, and again I endorse that approach.

That would leave us with free-fall nuclear bombs to be delivered by manned aircraft and submarine and surface-launched cruise missiles as NATO's only sub-strategic nuclear systems in Europe. I believe that that is not a credible sub-strategic deterrent. It forces us to rely much too heavily on Trident missiles, from both the United States and the United Kingdom. Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding underlined that point in his recent lecture, when he said that the United Kingdom Government needed options in the nuclear basket in addition to Trident. He saw Trident, as I think most of us do, as a last-ditch weapon to be used only against a threat of total destruction. So I regard the case for a stand-off tactical air-to-surface missile with a nuclear capability as an extremely powerful one.

Manned aircraft are increasingly vulnerable to improving air defences and the Gulf war experience does not invalidate that assessment. The Iraqi air defences crumbled simply because of the sheer weight of the non-stop onslaught on them and we should be very unwise to assume that that sort of situation would be repeated in any conflict on the continent of Europe. In any case, the initial stage of the Gulf war demonstrated the importance of stand-off weapons capable of being launched from aircraft out of reach of the defenders' anti-aircraft systems.

TASM is an extremely flexible system. It can be used against a wide variety of targets: airfields, ports, barracks, troop concentrations, industrial facilities or even ships. It provides the ability to respond swiftly almost anywhere in the world. It has the flexibility to be retargeted during the aircraft's flight. It can deliver small numbers of nuclear warheads against widely spaced targets, and of course it enables the aircraft to be used in conventional or nuclear roles.

Other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have referred to possible United States deployments, which we understand are due some time in the mid-1990s. We all understand the political difficulties in the current situation in deploying those new nuclear systems on the continent of Europe, although logically as many nations as possible should take a share of responsibility for the nuclear defence of our continent. Those difficulties underline the importance of the United Kingdom programme to replace the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb by a tactical air-to-surface missile.

The Secretary of State told us last year that he hoped to be able to announce the choice of a TASM system for the United Kingdom by the end of 1990. We now understand that the decision has been delayed for another year. We hear that there are problems with the Boeing SRAM-T system, one of the two American possibilities being considered. There is no secret about the fact that there are difficulties, to put it no higher than that, at Aldermaston over the design of a warhead for a British TASM system. And, of course, we know that the French are extremely anxious to see Anglo-French co-operation in developing the ASLP as an Anglo-French TASM system.

There have been suggestions that financial pressures may be one cause of delaying the programme. I hope very much that when the Minister replies to the debate he will make it clear that it is not financial pressures that have delayed the TASM programme. It is a vital issue for the RAF and indeed for our national defence. I hope that, when the Minister replies, we shall get a very clear statement of the current position.

6.36 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) for he, like the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), has shown that there is a rare consensus on defence and on where we should be going with the Royal Air Force.

I pay a tribute, as all speakers in the debate so far have, to the Royal Air Force for its outstanding performance in the whole Gulf theatre, to the Jaguar, Tornado, Buccaneer, Nimrod, Hercules and tanker crews, and of course to others who played an equally important part —in the VC10s, the Tristars and the communication squadrons—and who did so much throughout the whole period. It shows that the mix of aircraft required in a modern air force is substantial and that we cannot put all our eggs in two or three baskets. We need a wide variety of aircraft to cover a wide variety of operations.

Since 1945, all of us have seen the ever-growing importance of the helicopter. We saw from the huge numerical superiority of the American helicopters and our own substantial contribution what a vital part they play in modern warfare. I am sure that my right hon. Friend is giving very careful thought to what hon. Members have said tonight about replacement helicopters and types of helicopters. In many ways, they are the aircraft of the future and we must get on with it and not hold back because we cannot quite make up our minds what is the best design to go for.

I want to follow what the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East said about our search and rescue squadrons. They play a notable part in British national life —particularly, because of terrain and weather, in Scotland. They are based at Leuchars and Lossiemouth, and at Prestwick with the Royal Navy. Whenever there is a disaster of any sort, even one involving a single climber, there is the yellow helicopter setting a very fine example and showing brilliant airmanship in retrieving casualties in dreadful weather conditions. It is very important, as my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said, to ensure that our Royal Air Force crews have training in this extremely hazardous work so that, when they are required on operations abroad, they have the skill and experience to carry out their tasks.

[Sir Hector Monro]

I would be the last person to criticise the civilian helicopter service, which looks after search and rescue. After all, as has been said, the crews are trained by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. However, in years to come, that may not be the case. Nobody doubts that Bristow could provide this service, but, in the national context, it should be largely a Royal Air Force responsibility. I hope that the Government believe so firmly in the Royal Air Force search and rescue squadrons that those squadrons will be allowed to continue into the distant future.

The air crews have rightly been praised, but I am glad that my right hon. Friend put in a good word for the ground crews, too. I remember from wartime days what an incredible feat of logistics and organisation it is to move a squadron from one place to another and maintain its ability to be operational within minutes. It is a great credit to the ground staff serving in the Gulf that they maintained aircraft capability so effectively for so long.

This week, there has been a great deal of publicity about the phasing out of the RAF's Shackletons. It is appropriate that we should pay a tribute to those aircraft and the crews who have flown them over such a long period. Eight Squadron, based at Lossiemouth, has set the very highest standards in every way. It is with a tear in our eye that we wave farewell. We wish the squadron well on its move to Waddington, where it will use Boeing aircraft.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood mentioned the Royal Auxiliary Air Force medical and movement squadrons, which were called out to serve during the Gulf war. I pay great tribute to them and to the many women who served with the aeromedical squadron.

I am glad that the Government have encouraged and organised a thanksgiving service in Glasgow cathedral this weekend. This is a very fitting time to pay tribute to those who lost their lives and to thank all those who returned safely for their wonderful service. It is sad that some clergymen have raised so much unnecessary controversy about the service.

It is clear that fighting a modern war requires a tremendous combination of offensive and defensive capability. If we are to be involved in campaigns overseas, it is essential that our forces be capable of being deployed swiftly. One comes to view "Options for Change" and the comments of the Select Committee on Defence with some doubt as to how far and how fast we are going. In some ways, it would be good if we were still at the Green Paper stage, so that we could comment on the options before decisions were taken. As it is, I fear that decisions will be made and that we shall have to fight a rearguard action to achieve the capability that we regard as best in terms of the threat, about which, at the moment, nobody is the least bit clear.

In that regard, I appreciate what my right hon. Friend the Minister has said about finance. Of course there are always opportunities to reduce expenditure in any large organisation, such as the Royal Air Force, the Army or the Royal Navy. However, we must keep a balance with operational capability and training requirements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood very appropriately mentioned the importance of Royal Air Force training. Without exceptional training, we could not have achieved such success in the Gulf. I hope that, in the winding-up speech, we shall hear that there will be no reduction this year in the number of flying training hours. Training of this type is not something that can just be put down and picked up overnight. It has to be a continual operation, especially for the pilot of a fast jet.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East mentioned low-flying aircraft. The Select Committee has reported on this matter, and we have read the Government's comments with interest. I have supported low-flying training by the Royal Air Force. It is absolutely essential, as was proved by the skill of our pilots in the Gulf. But many members of the public, who are probably not so acutely aware of the importance of training, are concerned about the possibility of our having more low flying on account of attitudes in Germany and elsewhere on the continent. If the Government can say that the programme will continue much as before—that it will not be stepped up—many civilians will be reassured.

We still have heavy responsibilities in Northern Ireland, the Gulf and eastern Europe, and we have a heavy commitment to NATO. That is why I am so concerned that we may be moving rather faster than events justify. Reason for international concern often blows up at short notice out of nothing—and never more so than in the cases of the Falklands and the Gulf. When we are planning our defences, we must have a long lead. Operations cannot be planned overnight. Sophisticated weaponry necessitates planning years ahead. When the options are being considered, that fact must be borne in mind. I do not remember a time in my life—which some people may think has gone on far too long—when we had too many forces. We are always under pressure. Service men often work seven days a week, although one might think that they should work a normal week of five or five and a half days. We must try to balance our forces with the needs of the times. We can never be absolutely certain that there is not some dark, dangerous dictator lurking round the corner. We have to be prepared.

I am afraid that there are bound to be some cuts in defence expenditure, and Defence Ministers are concerned about the severe local consequences. RAF stations will be closed and defence orders will be lost. There are also serious political issues like Rosyth. Were we to lose regiments, there would be serious consequences. Our regiments have enormous support, countywide and countrywide. In nearly all cases, the standard of recruitment is very high. I can only very briefly touch on this problem, but what affects the Royal Air Force is equally serious for the other arms of the services.

In respect of one other matter, I urge the Government to act with foresight. Under the Armed Forces Act 1980 we were limited, to a certain extent, in calling out our reserves for service in the Gulf. This matter should not be swept under the carpet, on the ground that there will not be another crisis for five to 10 years. Let us get down to amending the 1980 Act next Session—or certainly the Session after—to provide for a much more effective means of calling out the reserves.

The Royal Auxiliary Air Force, the RAFVR and the Royal Navy and Army equivalents are made up of active reservists. Those people have volunteered to give their time, weekend after weekend, to prepare for a crisis. In many ways, they do not need to be asked to volunteer, as they already are volunteers. What they want is to be called out to serve by the Ministry of Defence. There are perfectly

adequate procedures if they cannot go for compassionate reasons. I hope that, in the event of another crisis, we shall not hesitate to call out active reservists, because they will respond to a man—or woman.

That should be clarified in the form of an Act of Parliament. It should be made clear, for instance, that the squadrons of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force could be called out to do guard duty at hard-pressed stations where the fitters were working morning, noon and night to repair and service aircraft to and from the Gulf. The guard duty could be done willingly by reservists, but they have so far been precluded from doing so. If, in a crisis, we have reservists who are real enthusiasts, let us use them: they will then feel that the whole object of their reserve life is being fulfilled.

We must look carefully at the future of the reserves. They are extremely cost-effective, as has already been pointed out. The Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment squadrons, the Defence Force flights and the Maritime Headquarters Unit are all very effective and are part of the line of battle of the Royal Air Force. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson): if only we could return to the days of the flying squadrons. In the days of the battle of Britain and before, they were the essence of the reserve forces in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and they have never failed when the country needed to be defended.

We must use the reserves, because so many men and women are involved. An enormous number of men and women want to serve this country, and welcome the opportunity of participating by engaging in military training. They want to own a share in the community. That will do an immense amount for their effectiveness at work, as well as the part that they play in the social life of the community. We must not let the reserves run down.

I keep hearing it said that, in the future, the reserves will be even more important in terms of "Options for Change". I should like that to be translated into action, because I believe that the promotion of the reserves of all three services is a real bull point.

We have learnt a good deal from the reports of the Select Committee inquiry and I pay tribute to the Chairman and members of that Committee for what they have achieved on our behalf. However, we should also pay tribute tonight to the RAF and to all those associated with it—and to the other services—for their outstanding performance in the Gulf. As a nation, we can take credit for something that was exceptionally well done.

6.52 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I want to raise three issues. The first is, of course, the Gulf war; the second is nuclear weapon modernisation, and the tactical air-to-surface missile; and the third is nuclear weapon safety, and the WE177—the free-fall hydrogen bomb.

The courage of our pilots in the Gulf war was beyond doubt. They did the job that they had been told to do, with devastating and destructive effectiveness. But—and here, as far as I am concerned, the consensus in the House ends —I believe that excessive force was used in that war. The allies deployed 2,790 aircraft. According to General McPeak, the Chief of Staff of the US air force, allied planes made a total of 109,876 sorties, and dropped 88,500 tonnes of bombs—50 per cent. more than were dropped in the whole of the Vietnam war. Apparently, 6,250 tonnes were delivered by laser-guided smart weapon systems. In addition to that, fuel air explosives and mini-nuclear weapons were used—allegedly only against minefields, but no doubt they caused considerable loss of life. The RAF dropped 3,000 tonnes of weapons—more than 100 JP233 airfield denial weapons, which cost over £1 million each; and some 6,000 bombs, of which more than 1,000 were laser-guided. It fired more than 100 anti-radar missiles and 700 air-to-ground rockets.

All that bombing effectively bombed Iraq back into the stone age. I say that it was excessive force, and that is implied in the words of the United States service man who described it as a "turkey shoot". In the dying days of the war—and that is certainly the right description—more than 100,000 people were slaughtered, including civilians and many conscripts who were retreating in those final days.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): Will the hon. Gentleman still call it a turkey shoot when I tell him that a constituent of mine, Mr. Croskery, was shot by the Iraqi army just after the invasion when trying to leave the country as an innocent civilian?

Mr. Cohen: It was a United States officer who described it as a turkey shoot. There is no need to go into the origins of the war, although I shall gladly do so if I am asked to. I still think that sanctions would have been a better way of resolving the conflict—and they still apply now—but we went to war, and, having done so, used excessive force. I do not think that the British people have been allowed to know the full horror; what they have seen amounts to a single photograph on an inside page of *The Observer*. In this country, excessive force has been matched only by excessive censorship.

As for smart weapons, I think that the war was a testing ground for them. It was, in a way, a training war—and that was part of the excessive force that was deployed. Even so, the weapons were not as surgical as was claimed. The United States bombed a civilian air shelter, causing the deaths of hundreds of innocent people. The RAF bombed the town of Fallujah, which can only be described as an atrocity. Overall in military terms, smart weapons were probably a success; but, in due course, they will be the source of a new arms race unless they are checked.

As for low flying, the problem did not relate to the bravery of the pilots, which was beyond argument; the problem related to the tactics laid down by the Ministry of Defence. Let us compare the Tornado GR1s with the US aircraft that were sent to the Gulf. Of the 42 British Tornado GR1s that were sent, six were lost in combat in the first week—another, I believe, was lost for another reason. That represents one in seven of the force. The US air force deployed approximately 1,400 aircraft, but lost only 13 in the course of the entire war—fewer than one in 100. In peacetime, too, our record of aircraft loss and loss of life among pilots is much greater than that in comparable air forces, including that of the United States. That is down to the tactics used by the Ministry of Defence.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman really should not compare the number of casualties with the total number of aircraft deployed in the theatre of conflict. He should use the number of sorties flown, or the number of hours. That would be a reasonable comparison.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman may not like those figures—one in seven, as against fewer than one in 100—but they represent the reality. As I have said, in peacetime our losses due to low flying are greater than those of the United States. Even the United States described our use of the GR1s as a suicide mission. That is down to the Ministry of Defence.

Those low-flying tactics put our RAF pilots into the only air space that had any air defence weapons—near the ground. One thing that the Iraqis were not short of were soldiers with machine guns and rifles. An individual soldier with an automatic rifle might not have had much chance of a hit, but many soldiers firing at the same target had a fairly high probability of hitting something, and that is what happened in the first week.

Mr. O'Neill: Is my hon. Friend saying that the Ministry of Defence was irresponsible in asking our pilots to take out airfields, something that they alone could do? Did the taking out of airfields in itself present a danger to the allies? If we had not taken out those airfields, they would have been able to respond, and the manner in which they responded would have created far more trouble for our troops than what happened in the first place.

Secondly, if we had not broken the heart and mind of the Iraqi air force in the first week, we might have had to deal with far greater problems. Thirdly, the Opposition supported that strategy as much as the Government, because we recognised the importance of air power, the capability not just of British, but of Saudi, Syrian, Egyptian and other air forces, in contributing to the effort. It meant that, if we could conduct a war in the air, we might prevent a potentially horrendous war from unfolding on the ground, with the loss of far more lives than the far too many lives that were actually lost.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Briefly, please.

Mr. O'Neill: This is my last point, by way of information. It seems that my hon. Friend requires such information because his understanding of the nature of the conflict and the strategy behind it is so out of line with what people saw as the objectives that he is distorting the character of the sacrifice that was made by our troops, whose bravery both he and I applaud. Their sacrifice was one that they were prepared for.

Mr. Cohen: As my hon. Friend says, I do not question the bravery and courage of our pilots. What I do question is the tactics. I am sorry to hear my hon. Friend justifying what I have described as excessive force. I do not think that he is right to say that our pilots alone could do that job. That is an insult to the United States air force, and it is not true. My hon. Friend is also going along with the myth that accompanied the build-up of the war, that the Iraqi war machine was the biggest and most dangerous around and was equivalent to that of the allies. That was done to justify this excessive force, when the reality was quite different.

Why, if what my hon. Friend says is right, did the Ministry of Defence change those tactics after the first week? They were changed because the losses were so great, because the tactics were so foolish. The truth of the matter is that the tactics were a consequence of the Ministry of Defence's obsession with low flying, which is seen as a tactic for a war in eastern Europe. That tactic was completely inappropriate in this war, but the Ministry of Defence used Iraq as a training ground for a future war with the Soviet Union, resulting in unnecessary loss of life and expensive aircraft.

The next matter is probably not so controversial—tactical air-to-surface missiles, particularly the United States TASM and the short-range attack missiles (tactical)—SRAM-T—which is fitted to the F15E aircraft. Will the Government say clearly whether they will allow SRAM-Ts to be based at United States bases in Britain? The Government cannot hide behind the pretence that that is a NATO decision which is yet to be made, because that is not the case. The Germans do not want SRAM-Ts on their soil and have made that clear, and the basing of F15E aircraft at Lakenheath and Bentwaters, to which the SRAM-T is designed to be fitted, was a bilateral decision of the United States and the United Kingdom, not a NATO one.

Does the Minister see the basing of SRAM-Ts in Britain as important to our defence or not? The Minister should not stay silent. He cannot stay silent. I do not think that it is important, because it is part of the nuclear weapons modernisation programme that was conceived and decided upon during the cold war and before the present phase in international politics.

Since then, there have been all sorts of changes in eastern Europe. Having lost eastern Europe as their starting point, Soviet air defences are relatively weak. The Warsaw pact has been wound up, and President Gorbachev has made real efforts towards achieving a reduction in nuclear weapons. The deployment of SRAM-T would aversely affect arms control agreements that we should be striving to achieve. It is not needed to deal with such out-of-area third-world threats as the Gulf war. The Iraqi air defences were overwhelmed with conventional weaponry. We do not need new nuclear missiles in those cases.

Those arguments do not just apply to the United States TASM based in Britain, but also suggest that the Government should not go ahead with the so-called British TASM, either buying the United States SRAM-T off the shelf or deploying the French missile built with American support, the ASLP.

Nuclear weapon storage facilities for TASMs at United States bases are still going ahead at Bentwaters, Lakenheath and Upper Heyford. They were originally proposed, again as part of the modernisation process, in 1986, but two weeks ago it was said that they would go ahead. Ironically, they are going ahead with NATO rather than with American money, despite the fact that SRAM-T is the result of a bilateral decision. Does that mean that the Minister wants TASMs and SRAM-Ts based here, despite their current irrelevance to international realities, or are the storage facilities going ahead so that SRAM-Ts come here anyway as a fait accompli in due course? We have a right to expect an answer from the Minister on that point.

Thirdly, I want to refer to the WE177, the free-fall hydrogen bomb, particularly its safety and the safety of other weapons as well. The recent Drell report in the United States has shown that many nuclear weapons, not just Trident, are not as safe as was previously thought. Some of the less safe American warheads are of the same vintage as the WE177 bomb. That is confirmed by the report on warhead safety published, I think last week, by Basic.

Excessive secrecy has surrounded British nuclear weapons, making it easy for Ministers to give bland assurances about weapon safety while allowing no independent checks. There is a so-called independent Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee, but that is covered by the Official Secrets Act. The Government's obsession with secrecy precludes any member of that committee who feels that a weapon is unsafe from telling anyone in Parliament or in public unless authorised to do so by Ministers. How can that be independent? Have the Government found some obscure definition of the word that is not in common use?

A recent opinion poll published in *The Scotsman* on Monday shows that 78 per cent. of respondents said that the British Parliament should have access to the same quality of information as the Americans about the safety or otherwise of their nuclear weapons. Fifty-eight per cent. thought that the transportation of nuclear weapons should be stopped until the safety questions had been resolved. The Government just hide behind their secrecy.

Let me tease the Government a little. I challenge the Minister to reassure the public and Parliament by telling us what safety features are included in British weapons design. Surely it cannot affect national security to say whether a nuclear weapon's pit is fire-resistant or that safer insensitive high explosives—IHEs—are used on all nuclear weapons. The Government's position on safety lacks credibility. The weapons are designed by AWRE Aldermaston, an organisation which cannot even organise safety features in its own A90 and A91 buildings. The Government expect us to believe that they have got the weapons right, so they must provide some answers about weapons safety.

In 12 years in power, the Government have not changed one iota. They want more nuclear weapons regardless of the international circumstances, and they are prepared to sacrifice hospitals and living standards to get them. A peace dividend is anathema to them, but the change will come. Britain's economic circumstances will not regard yet more bombs and missile as a priority. I hope that that change comes sooner rather than later.

7.10 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye early in this debate. As so oftens happens, just as one is beginning to take an interest in a debate, a flurry of telephone messages comes in and a local situation must be dealt with. I apologise for leaving the Chamber to tackle that matter. To be fair to other hon. Members, it behoves me to be brief.

Mr. O'Neill: Oh, no.

Mr. Dykes: I shall be brief, notwithstanding the exhortation of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill).

Most of the points made by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) were phantasmagorical in the extreme and I do not propose to follow them. It was interesting for us to observe the fact that there is a gap on the Labour Benches on defence matters, notwithstanding the fact that officially the Labour party fully supported the Government's stance on the Gulf war. We know that there are still divisions in the Labour party and that was clear from the rather angry exchanges that took place earlier. I was hoping for more of them, because it would have reminded the public that such a division exists and that the Labour party is not as monolithic on defence matters as Conservative Members are——

Mr. O'Neill: Monolithic?

Mr. Dykes: Yes, monolithic in the more attractive sense of the adjective and not the sense adduced by the hon. Member for Clackmannan.

That unity has always been one of our great strengths. The public has confidence in a Conservative Government on defence matters.

Mr. O'Neill: What about the Bruges group?

Mr. Dykes: I should resist the temptation to respond to sedentary interventions. The Bruges group is collapsing by the minute and we do not need to dwell on it tonight. The fact that it is in the news here at the moment is, in one sense, good rather than bad news.

We are presumably on the verge of constructing a Europeanwide defence policy after the NATO emergency period during the cold war. In that sense, presumably there are lessons to be learned from the Gulf conflict and the detailed modalities of defence policy with the use of land forces and air weapons.

Unless I am misrepresenting the Government's official policy, I am glad that we do not want a European Community defence policy. That would be an illogical proposition. In the confused state of the debate about some of the allies not taking part in warlike activities and being rather timid, there was a suggestion that there should be a Community defence policy. However, the European Community is the world's major civilian power—if I can use such a colloquial description. The Community does not have a defence parameter.

As I understand it, the Government are suggesting, subject to elaboration of these complicated issues, that the Community could participate in the development of security policy alongside foreign policy. I see the logic of a wider security policy background as part of the foreign policy configurations of the Community. We must bear it in mind that at least one country might have difficulty with questions of neutrality and those countries might not be able to participate. An overall umbrella concept of security policy is distinct from the narrower policy in a military sense. To bring the latter concept into the European Community is most strange. It is even stranger that Jacques Delors, who until then had often been accused of being too zealous in his promotion of the commanding heights of Community policy, suddenly said, on a visit to the Institute of Strategic Studies here, that there should be a Community defence policy. The whole issue has become very confused. We must now see what will develop in future, but the Royal Air Force will have an important role.

I am glad that official spokesmen are no longer accusing the allies of running away in the face of the war in the Gulf. The phrase, "running for the cellars," caused outrage in Germany and elsewhere, and quite rightly. That was an unfair attack on our German allies. Such accusations have now subsided, and things are returning to normal.

All hon. Members, even the hon. Member for Leyton, have paid tribute to the RAF and its courage in the Gulf. In adding my words to that tribute which the House has recognised unanimously on many occasions, I take

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pleasure in the fact that I have the honour of having in my constituency part of No. 11 Group RAF Bentley Priory, one of the headquarters in the constellation that is commanded by Air Vice-Marshal Bill Wratten, who was the commander of the RAF forces in the Gulf.

I met Bill Wratten on Saturday night at a local civil function. Harrow had the privilege and honour earlier this year of according to RAF Bentley Priory the freedom of the borough. We recorded that Harrow is extremely proud of RAF Bentley Priory and RAF Stanmore Park and of what the RAF has done for this country. RAF Bentley Priory was the control centre for the battle of Britain and is therefore a solemn shrine to the courage and valour of the RAF. Air Vice-Marshal Bill Wratten follows a long line of extremely talented senior Air Force officers. The current chief of the air staff also commanded Bentley Priory. Bill Wratten is young and extremely talented and he will be annoyed that I am making these remarks tonight, but I must make them. He was in charge of the forces in the Gulf and they did a superb and wonderful job.

I am sure that the MOD evaluations by the experts who know far more about these matters than we do will be able to draw the appropriate lessons from what happened in the Gulf war. Unlike the hon. Member for Leyton, I have no quarrel with the tactics and strategy of the Gulf war. The conflict was a superb vindication of the United States-led coalition. There were whingers and moaners early on, but that is understandable. Some people always have doubts and warfare is a horrendous matter. However, the Gulf conflict paid off triumphantly. We were mightily relieved that our casualties, including the Air Force casualties, were so few. Each of those casualties was a sad bereavement for the family and friends concerned and for the nation. But, mercifully, there were very few casualties and we thank the Almighty and our commanders for that result.

Once a conflict is over it is perfectly legitimate for people to ask questions about it and seek more information. The media were very controlled during the conflict, presumably because the United States, after its bitter lessons in Vietnam, was determined to exercise such control. That policy was successful, but it means that the information to hand after the conflict is very limited.

Almost my only doubts about the conflict stem from the incidents that occurred towards the end of the war when the Iraqi forces were retreating from Kuwait. There may be answers about that in future. So far as one can tell, senior British officers were aghast at what they saw when they arrived at the scene. In due course, the Americans or others will provide more information about it. Surely, once the tactics and the strategies have succeeded, there is no need for overkill or the sort of things that may have happened in the Gulf.

I say "may" because I do not want to be unjust. It is easy for armchair experts and observers to pass judgment without having any direct experience, and I am conscious of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is nodding; he is obviously concerned with what I am saying. He has great experience of the Royal Air Force. I reassure him that it is all right to have these thoughts; there is no danger to our troops once the conflict has ended. While the conflict continued, it was different —there had to be national solidarity. I am sure that everyone understands that.

It is legitimate to raise questions after the conflict is ended, not least on behalf of the hapless Iraqi soldiers and civilians who were the main victims of Saddam Hussein —an evil dictator who used those people as malleable pawns in his demonic plans. Unhappily, he has survived. I presume that there will be more information on that in due course. In such a controlled dictatorship, it is difficult to know exactly what is happening and what people feel about someone who has apparently eliminated so many of his opponents.

There are bound to be questions, and there is no need for anyone to be apologetic about that. It is possible that thousands of soldiers were killed unnecessarily. Our understanding is that the Americans, at the highest level in the Pentagon, had to intervene and stop the killing because it was getting out of hand.

A major lesson that we have learnt is that, were such a conflict to occur again—we hope that it will not—the United Nations would have to be more co-ordinated. It must be fully in control of what is happening, except for the military activities that come under the control of military commanders and their command headquarters in the relevant countries. The war was not about the intrinsic survival of the United States, Britain or any other allied country. There were some 400 million people ranged against a nation of 17 million. What the Iraqi dictator did to his hapless and innocent conscripted soldiers is a tragedy both in middle eastern and world history. We must maintain a balanced appraisal, because we all wish to avoid war if we can.

The EFA programme has already been mentioned, and my hon. Friend the Minister has reassured the House about its progress. It is already a successful incipient project which, as my right hon. Friend said, is close to its first prototype early next year. That will be the precursor to the production stage. It is essential that we think beyond the Tornado to the next generation of aircraft. As I said previously, it is a great pity that the French did not join the project. I presume that it is now too late for them to do so. I think that they made a mistake. There is an overriding priority for all European countries to get together on new generations of equipment to ensure that the RAF, which has done so well, is properly equipped for the future. We must ensure that the RAF's talented people and its new recruits fly with the best equipment that we can provide. We can no longer provide that equipment from our resources because we are a small country, so we must get together with other countries.

I was a humble ministerial assistant in the Ministry of Defence in the 1970s when the Tornado—the multi-role combat aircraft—was first promulgated. There has been a vindication of the success of a Europeanwide multi-purpose aircraft. I vividly remember that when it first came off the drawing board all the newspapers said that it was an absurd notion—an impossible project that could never come to fruition because of all the bureaucracy in the various countries. The Tornado has vindicated those who had faith in it. It performed superbly in the Gulf theatre and elsewhere.

Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for calling me early in the debate. I have pleasure, satisfaction

and pride in paying tribute to the Royal Air Force for what it has done for this country, not only recently but over many years.

7.24 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who is one of the most Euro-minded Members in this House. I was interested in what he said about the defence factor within Europe, the fact that the Western European Union has now been given a new impetus, and the fact that it is important that we remember that NATO still provides the basis for the defence of the west and our European partners within it. As the European Community enlarges, if the countries that successfully apply to join it are not already members of NATO, I am sure that they will be welcome to join if they wish to do so.

Like my hon. Friend, I had difficulty in finding anything good in the speech of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). However, I always take great pains to find common ground. Searching almost in vain, I managed to find some comments with which I wholeheartedly agreed. He said that we needed to be very careful about to whom we sold arms. He spoke of the high technology of the weapons deployed in the Gulf, and said that we should be careful not to find ourselves in a hi-tech arms race. We have successfully avoided a nuclear arms race. It is good that the hon. Gentleman and I can find some common ground.

I am sure that we would also agree with the hon. Gentleman that war is bad. His pacifist credentials are well displayed. His statistics on the Gulf war were interesting. He mentioned the 100,000 tonnes of bombs that were dropped, and said that that was more than were dropped in Vietnam. The fact is that the allies won the Gulf war, but the Americans lost the Vietnam war. We had the pay-off of victory, with a minimum of allied casualties.

I could not help but contrast the hon. Gentleman's speech with that of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). The difference between them raised a question about the real thrust of the defence debate within the Labour party. Although it appears that the Labour party has turned about on its defence policy, a sizeable rump within the party still takes a different view. In the run-up to a general election, the electorate would be wise to ask just to what degree the tail still wags the dog. There is no doubt that CND is still alive and well, and the hon. Member for Leyton is a prominent member. We should not simply accept that the Labour party has changed its spots. I am sure that the electorate will give that careful thought before the next election.

I could not but help also contrasting the hon. Gentleman's speech with that of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). His speech could easily have been made from the Conservative Benches, so there is no reason why he and his two colleagues in the SDP—all that is left of the parliamentary party—should not join us. They would be welcome. I could then refer to the hon. Gentleman as my hon. Friend, which I should be pleased to do. There is certainly plenty of room on our Benches tonight.

All hon. Members have joined in paying the warmest tribute to the Royal Air Force for its dramatically successful role in the recent Gulf conflict. I have heard many hon. Members, especially the members of the Select Committee on Defence, say tonight they they visited the Gulf twice during the war. That may well be the case, but, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and four other parliamentary colleagues, I was there first, and there must be something in that. We met many of the air and ground crews who were later so successfully engaged in the war against Saddam Hussein. I use those words because it was Saddam Hussein we were fighting rather than the Iraqi people. There is no doubt that the heroism, dedication to duty and skill of our Royal Air Force personnel are second to none.

Mr. Dykes: Would my hon. Friend be interested to know that, as on previous occasions, Air Vice-Marshal Wratten said with great emphasis on Saturday night that the letters and messages from home were of enormous help to the air and ground crews? Those letters included messages from schoolchildren and even from politicians. I could say that letters from politicians are rare, but I would not really mean it. In their initial long wait and then in the shorter waits between sorties and missions, it was extremely moving for the crews to be inundated with messages, which they found of great comfort, from the British people.

Mr. Colvin: I am glad to hear that. My hon. Friend's intervention has reminded me that, when my hon. Friends and I arrived in the Gulf, we were struck by the fact that the main concern of the RAF personnel and the civilian aerospace operatives in Saudi Arabia was what their friends and families back home thought about the situation in the Gulf. There is no doubt that some of the alarmist reports in the newspapers and on television and radio caused anxiety not only to people here, but to those deployed in the Gulf, who felt that the people back home were getting the wrong impression about the dangers in which they were living and working.

I draw the Minister's attention to the need to win the propaganda war, especially in the run-up to a conflict. My hon. Friends and I who visited the Gulf noted the marked contrast between the way in which the United Kingdom's forces handled the media in terms of press and information releases and the way in which the Americans did the same thing. When we returned home, one of the first things that we did was to impress upon the Ministry of Defence the need to improve its press and information services so that the right messages would get through not only to the world's press but to our own press, who were present in the Gulf in great numbers waiting for something to happen.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State referred earlier to the speed and efficiency of the deployment to the Gulf of our aircraft and airmen in August and September of 1990 and later. A great tribute for the way in which that was managed so successfully must be paid to the British personnel there, especially the 3,500 British Aerospace personnel who were already in the Gulf taking part in the massive Al Yamamah contract, which is the biggest ever single export order for the United Kingdom for the supply of defence hardware to the Saudi Arabians, and which also involves the construction of an air base and, among other things, a town for 25,000 people.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan praised the Saudi Arabian air crews. Having had the opportunity to meet air crews from the Royal Saudi air force, I thoroughly endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments. I well recall our debates

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in the early 1980s, both inside and outside the House, about the future of the JP233 bomb, which is used for knocking out enemy runways. There was much debate about whether that project should proceed and, like everyone else, I am pleased that it did.

The deployment of that bomb calls for exceptional bravery on the part not only of the pilots—there have been many tributes this evening to the bravery of our pilots—but also from men who sometimes do not get the praise that they deserve. I refer to the weapons systems officers, also known as WESOs, who do not fly the aircraft but who sit behind the pilots and have the job of making sure that the systems work. When I was at the Riyadh training centre of the Royal Saudi air force, I suggested that the WESO is as important today as the pilot. It is often felt that those officers are second-class citizens, but that is far from being the case, and we must pay tribute to their work in the Gulf conflict.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre would be the first to agree that, if the JP233 bomb had been available during the Falklands operation, his task as a Vulcan pilot, taking out the Falklands airport runway, would have been a great deal easier.

To win a war, one must have air superiority and air supremacy. The Gulf conflict once again proved the truth of that and demonstrated the need to be one step ahead technically. I join those who have already called for the possible development of a stand-off capability from the JP233 bomb. We saw with amazement some of the feats of the Tomahawk cruise missile. If the JP233 bomb could be given the same flexibility, through wings, an engine and a guidance system, that would be greatly welcomed by all the pilots and WESOs who delivered it so successfully during the Gulf campaign.

Another aspect of the Gulf war was high mobility, which is an important principle of war. When we were in Saudi Arabia, we saw the massive number of helicopters that were already being deployed by the United States of America, including many Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters. I hope that, when they withdraw their forces from the Gulf, the Americans will not leave that hardware behind, thereby damaging the prospects of stage II of the Al Yamamah project, which includes the supply of 88 Black Hawk helicopters to the Royal Saudi air force. Those helicopters are to be assembled by Westland. The total order is worth about £1 billion, it is important business for Britain and for Westland. I am told that 20 such helicopters are wanted urgently.

Any debate on the Royal Air Force tends to concentrate on fixed-wing aircraft and their weapons, and this evening's debate has been no exception. However, helicopters are also important to the Royal Air Force although it has only eight Chinook helicopters for support purposes, such as for transporting men and materials around the battlefield and elsewhere. Those helicopters are now being successfully deployed in northern Iraq and Turkey, bringing relief to the Kurds.

The defence White Paper states that our Chinooks are being updated to improve their reliability—that is good news—and to extend their life well into the next century. I was sorry that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State did not say anything about helicopters earlier. No doubt he is leaving his views on the subject until his reply.

I want to make a few remarks about, first, the supply of the utility EH101 helicopter to the Royal Air Force and, secondly search and rescue operations, about which other hon. Members have spoken and for which helicopters are used by the Royal Air Force.

Four years ago, in April 1987, the then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), announced that the Ministry of Defence would place an order for 25 utility EH101 helicopters, which were being developed jointly by Westland and Agusta of Italy. Westland has completed phase 1 of a project definition study. It was completed in early 1990. It was proposed to build variants of the basic utility version.

Phase 2 of the study aims to provide more details of the selected variant to enable the project to go to the full development stage. Alas, the delays already experienced mean that the first aircraft is most unlikely to enter service with the RAF until 1998. That is much later than the statement by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr suggested. He referred to delivery in the early 1990s. It almost seems as if "Options for Change" is being used as a further reason for delaying the programme, which I regret.

The order for 25 utility EH101s, to be used in the support role, gives the aircraft an important endorsement by the Royal Air Force and helps to spread the cost of developing the technically more sophisticated versions of the EH101 for the Navy and the Army and, of course, developing the aircraft for civil use, where it has considerable potential. The EH101 could not only become the standard British helicopter for all the services but, through Westland's business link with Sikorsky, could find a profitable market in the United States. The aircraft certainly fits neatly into Sikorsky's product range.

I do not wish to give the impression that the EH101 is a drawing board aircraft. Nine pre-production aircraft have flown in Britain and Italy; 1,000 flying hours and 1,000 separate missions have been completed. The aircraft has landed at sea on frigates. A utility version with a rear landing ramp is flying in Italy, and British troop trials show that 30 combat-equipped soldiers with their support weapons can load in two minutes, which is much quicker than I was ever able to load my platoon into three-ton trucks when I was in the Army.

The EH101 has a top speed of 167 knots, or 193 miles per hour, at 12,000 ft. It can fly backwards and sideways at 50 knots. The test pilots who have flown the aircraft say that it is very free of vibration. Those of us who have flown a lot in helicopters know that vibration is a major problem. When my right hon. Friend the Minister replies, I should like him to tell us when the order will be placed for those 25 utility helicopters.

My right hon. Friend the Minister's review "Options for Change" raises another interesting question. For many years, there has been a debate about who should fly the Army around the battlefield and on other journeys. At present, the Royal Air Force has the job of flying our Chinook helicopters. I would argue that that role should be performed by the Army Air Corps. There have been arguments for and against that. I remind the House that the Army Air Corps is responsible only for flying the Army's helicopters. The RAF flies the Chinooks. The Royal Corps of Transport is responsible for handling the transport of the Army by road, rail and sea. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary sails from the Royal Corps of Transport

headquarters at Marchwood in my constituency. I have not heard the suggestion before, but under "Options for Change", my right hon. Friend the Minister might like to consider amalgamating the Royal Corps of Transport and the Royal Army Air Corps and giving them the role of flying the Chinooks and the EH101 utility version helicopters that I hope will be ordered.

Mr. Bill Walker: Before my hon. Friend goes too far down that road, will he remember that one of the reasons why the Royal Air Force is able to have pilots available for all the different roles and activities that it performs is that, for example, if a fast jet pilot injures his back he can be transferred to helicopters? There would be problems in transferring light blue to khaki.

Mr. Colvin: I hear my hon. Friend's remarks. If a debate ensues about who should fly the support helicopters, no doubt my hon. Friend will take an active part in it. His point is a valid one.

Admittedly, we live in a changing world, but some trends are clear, even in these uncertain times. One trend that is crystal clear is the requirement for our armed forces to be more mobile. In the main, helicopters—both attack and logistic versions—will give us that mobility. Other countries have no difficulty in recognising that and acting accordingly. The French, Germans and Italians have co-ordinated their efforts, and their manufacturers have a clear idea of their military markets in terms of types and numbers of helicopters for the next 20 years. It is about time that we too made progress on that front.

Our armed forces search and rescue helicopter teams are the envy of the world. In 1989 SAR was called out 1,903 times and rescued 1,275 people in demanding and dangerous situations. Merchant seamen, fishermen and hill climbers were rescued, usually in filthy weather. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), whom I see here in the Chamber, drew attention to the great value of the service. I seem to recall that, during the Lockerbie disaster, SAR performed an important mission. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries nodding. SAR has an important role to play. However, it is maintained primarily for the military role, which is why I believe that the Royal Air Force should retain responsibility for it.

Three years ago a review carried out by the Ministry of Defence showed that there was a need for search and rescue teams to be combat effective. That review concluded that it was a job for the Royal Air Force. I hope that "Options for Change" will not be used as another excuse for prevarication on the subject. I know that the Ministry of Defence has received an unsolicited contractorisation bid from a civilian helicopter firm. I believe that it is Bristow.

Mr. Bill Walker: That is right.

Mr. Colvin: Indeed, it is Bristow. The company is interested in taking on the work performed by at least parts of the military SAR service. Bristow is a splendid firm, I have a high regard for the professional way in which it conducts its operations, especially serving in the North sea. I do not belittle it in any way. However, if the contract went to a civilian firm, it would almost certainly use foreign-built helicopters. If the contract remained in the capable hands of the Royal Air Force, the Ministry of Defence could proceed with replacement of the obsolete, but much-loved, Wessex helicopters with 10 Sea King helicopters from Westland. Another valid commercial reason for replacement with Sea Kings is that, if a decision is not made soon, the Sea King production line may have to close. Therefore, the option of procuring that excellent SAR helicopter would no longer exist. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) drew attention to the importance of preserving our defence-industrial base, and that must also apply to helicopters.

Many hon. Members will join me in expressing pleasure at the fact that the Westland-Sikorsky solution to Westland's problems has been a great success. I believe that even my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, were he in his place, would probably now agree that going American was better than going European, and Westland's results for last year prove my point.

Sir Leslie Fletcher, chairman of the Westland group, told his shareholders at the annual general meeting in February that orders were up 30 per cent., that profit before tax was up 27 per cent., that earnings per share were up 16 per cent., that gearing was less than 18 per cent. and better than last year and that civil orders' intake was about 40 per cent., with total margins up in all divisions. That has been a real success story. I should like to see the company get the orders to which I referred, to help Westland help the RAF to defend Britain and our allies and our joint interests all over the world.

7.50 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): It is always a pleasure to take part in the annual debate on the Royal Air Force, and this year we are anxious to express the nation's gratitude for the great professionalism, courage and skill shown by all ranks during Operation Granby in the Gulf.

It should be recorded in a debate such as this that the headquarters for the operation was Strike Command headquarters at High Wycombe and that Air Chief Marshal Sir Paddy Hine was the commander in chief of the overall operation. It was, of course, very much a joint operation and credit is due to all those in the command structure as well as to those in the front line. Credit is also due to those who prepared for the unforeseen—for the event that nobody could foretell in detail—so that there was in existence a command structure that was able to adapt itself to the speedily arising crisis thousands of miles away.

For me, the whole of the crisis—the campaign and the build-up to it—was particularly poignant, because I was taking part at the time in the parliamentary liaison scheme, I was thus in regular contact with the young men and women who were called on to respond to the challenge when it came, and they responded in a way of which we can be proud. That came as no surprise to me, after what I had seen of them in their normal operational life.

It was also poignant for me that one of the air crew who was shot down and captured, and who was then paraded on television in breach of the Geneva convention, was one of my constituents. He has been referred to as a weapons system officer, but I still call him a navigator. I believe that I am technically correct, and when I saw that fine young man recently, he was wearing a navigator's uniform.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will know that, in the RAF, navigators frequently drop bombs.

Mr. Trotter: My hon. Friend speaks on these issues with great personal knowledge.

I pay tribute to the courage and steadfastness of the parents of young Adrian Nichol, who went through a terrible ordeal, not least because of the dreadful rumours that kept coming out of Iraq and were picked up by the media. Throughout that difficult time, they showed great bravery and determination and utter support for what the Allies were having to do in the Gulf.

The campaign, Operation Granby, was a striking demonstration of the flexibility and effectiveness of air power. An extraordinary feature of the campaign was the way in which, night after night, we were able to see on television in our homes the unfolding of the air war. Nobody can be unaware of the way in which air power contributed dramatically to the allied victory.

The speed of the initial response was truly impressive. Towards the end of the operation, I visited Lossiemouth, where I was particularly struck by the way in which, halfway through the air fighting, the Buccaneer force responded to the call. They had originally volunteered to be in on the action, but it was thought that the Tornados, with the Jaguars, would be able to manage. It was then found that the skills of the Buccaneers—skills that they have honed to a fine art in attacks on shipping, pinpointing such small targets—with their laser-designating system, gave them a part to play in the accurate bombing of targets in the Gulf.

I was impressed, although not surprised, to hear of the way in which, within 48 hours of being asked to get their rather old aircraft to the war, they were off on the nine-and-a-half-hour flight to the Gulf. Those who are not experienced in flying in the back seats of high-performance aircraft, for whom an hour and a half is an exhilarating experience, will wonder how anybody could manage a flight lasting nine or more hours. When the challenge came, they showed their strength and capability.

Reference has been made to the transport force, which operates worldwide in peace time. During Operation Granby, it proved to be the largest air transport operation in the history of the RAF. When I say that to move one squadron of fighters can require up to 90 loads in transport aircraft, the scale and magnitude of what had to be undertaken becomes apparent.

Reference has been made to the role played by the Nimrods. I understand that, during the campaign, they made 5,000 challenges to shipping in the Gulf—an impressive performance. During my visits to the service, I was pleased to meet units of the Auxiliary Air Force, some of whom, as has been said, took part as units and as individuals in the Gulf.

I greatly commend to the House the parliamentary liaison scheme. I was able to see the front line—sadly, not in the Gulf, but in this country on exercise—and to take part in sorties, when the capabilities and skill of the crews and the speed of their reaction were brought home to me. On my flights, I was made very aware of their professionalism and high standard of training. My observations left me in no doubt that there must be constant practice in low-level flying to maintain the standards that are needed.

The experiences that I enjoyed varied between the thrill of flying on the ranges at low level over the sea in a Tornado to flying in a Shackleton. I had last flown in the latter in 1958, and it did not seem to have changed much. I dare say that the sons of the crews who flew me in 1958 were flying me on the most recent occasion. That could hardly have been so for the wing commander of the squadron, because I recognised him as an old friend who had been flying for most of the last 30 years, having started as a very young man.

In terms of size, I flew in aircraft varying from the Hercules to the tiny Bulldogs of the Northumbria university air squadron. I was able to visit all three commands; Strike and Support Commands in the United Kingdom and RAF Germany. I enjoyed a particularly thrilling take-off in a Harrier from a German wood, when it seemed to me that the wing tips were touching the trees on either side. I had my hands on the ejection lever ready instantly to obey the command to get out, without asking questions if anything went wrong. The group captain who had earlier been escorting me was blown over by the efflux from the jets as we passed near him, so close were we to the trees.

I was struck by the way in which we could move 1,000 or 1,500 men and 30 or more aircraft and deposit them literally in a field, along with hundreds of lorries and all the stores that go with a wing of aircraft. It was all done smoothly in difficult surroundings. It is such flexibility, training and superb professionalism that enable the service to respond to the unexpected.

I visited a training unit in which I had served as a young man many years ago. When I expressed the wish to see some of the places of which I had happy memories, the commanding officer told me that I would find it very different, as all the old buildings had been pulled down, and mostly that was true. They had been replaced by much more modern buildings than the ones that I remembered but the spirit of the service had not changed. It was as high and fine as I remembered from all those years ago. I made it my business to ask to meet men and women of all ranks. One must be careful because one otherwise might spend most of one's time with the wing commanders. I wanted to speak not only to the air crews but also to those who support them and constitute the training and administrative structure behind them. I also asked to meet the wives, because we should not underestimate the importance of family life in today's modern service.

In south Wales, I visited the RAF factory at St. Athan. I was particularly impressed by the technical skills displayed and the team effort of the civilian and service personnel, which is such a feature of the service today.

It is appropriate tonight to thank a large number of people, starting with my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), who is the brain behind the concept of the parliamentary liaison scheme. I should also like to thank Mr. Speaker for his important role in the scheme, and Ministers, their officers and the air staff who made the scheme possible. I also thank my friendly hosts at the various stations and the enthusiastic staff at the three commands.

Above all, however, I should like to thank the men and women who make it all possible. They discussed with me their capabilities and achievements, together with the challenges before them, and their natural concerns about the future. The importance of maintaining the quality of service life is the main message that I would bring back from my experiences.

A feature that now emerges prominently is the new management strategy. It is not only in the health service that we are seeing efforts to bring about a more responsive budgeting process. Local financial management is now

being introduced throughout the services. In general, I found enthusiasm for it, although there was some cynicism about whether the financial savings would be left at the unit concerned, rather than taken away higher up the chain or indeed taken away from the service altogether. It is important that flexibility and savings come from this praiseworthy change in financial control, in which decisions are taken at the bottom, and that there should be local advantages from those changes. I am sure that that is the intention and we must see that it is the way in which it works out in practice.

Lessons will be learnt from the Gulf war, many of them technical. Some may take time to learn but others are more obvious. One such lesson is the importance of smart weapons, which are expensive but which work. They have improved dramatically and we shall need to continue to invest in that direction. Other hon. Members have referred to various individual weapons. I have always felt that stealth aircraft will be a feature in the future of combat aircraft.

I was impressed by the role of the F117 in the Gulf campaign. I understand that it was the only aircraft to bomb Baghdad. Although there were only 40 of them in the Gulf, a high percentage of the most difficult targets were taken out by them. It has been suggested that the Royal Air Force should invest in a small number of those aircraft. That is not a stupid suggestion.

Clearly, our main aircraft for the future will be the European fighter aircraft. I cannot help commenting on the thought that there will not be a navigator or weapons system officer in the back of such aircraft. Despite all the technology in such aircraft, there will be a heavy burden on the individual, who must both pilot it and operate the attack system. We may well need a small number of aircraft with more stealth elements than can be built into the EFA, but that is a technical matter that can be considered in the future.

The flexibility of air power was superbly demonstrated in the Gulf conflict. There will certainly continue to be threats that we cannot now imagine. They will arrive suddenly and will require a capability and speed of response from the Air Force in the future as they have in the past. We must maintain our military capability, and the standard of personnel and equipment. Whatever the outcome of the "Options for Change" review, we must ensure that we maintain the quality of life of those who serve in the air force, as well as in the Army and Navy.

Our motto must be "smaller but better". The reduction of some nine fast jet squadrons, which has been announced, is generally accepted within the service as something that is bound to happen with the change in the balance between east and west and the collapse of the Warsaw pact. We must under "Options for Change" take the opportunity to end the undermanning and overstretch that exists in some parts of the service.

We also need a critical mass. I do not say that the reduction in prospect would overload that, but we are nearing it with the level of reductions suggested. Unless we have a critical mass, we cannot generate adequate forces to respond to the sudden challenge.

May I return to the question of the quality of life? These days, wives are very important in regular service life. "Wife power" kept coming through as an important factor in the morale and life of the stations. Nowadays, wives want their family to own their own homes. They want a stable life, but service life is inevitably unstable. They want careers of their own, which is not easy when their husbands are inevitably posted.

The person concerned is usually a wife, but the argument applies both ways to spouses these days. I was struck by the extent to which the service tried hard to be helpful, particularly when both husband and wife were in the Air Force. It went to great lengths to secure postings at the same base or at bases in close proximity.

Whenever possible, I met the wives and sought their views. I found that the Air Force had responded positively to the challenge. An organisation entitled HIVE—Help Information and Voluntary Exchange—has introduced successful initiatives among the families in the units. A factor of RAF life is that postings are made individually, unlike the Army, where units are usually moved as a whole and people thus move around together. The same happens with ships' companies in the Royal Navy. From a family point of view, that means that more support is often needed for Royal Air Force families than for those of the Army or Navy.

Morale cannot be quantified, but it is clearly vital. It has never been higher than at present in the air force. We must ensure that it stays that way. In the Gulf, the quality of the service was splendidly demonstrated, and we must retain that quality in the future. It is not just important; it is essential. It does not matter how good technical equipment is if morale is not high. Unless people are well trained and motivated, we shall not achieve the required standards. There is no doubt that some departments are overstretched. Many units or parts of units work way below established strength. Too often, the establishment does not allow adequately for leave or sickness or for guard duty, which is an increasing feature of today's service, or for frequent absence on detachment, whether to the Falkland islands, Belize or now, presumably, to the Gulf.

Under the "Options for Change" review, we should look carefully into the question of manning and must return to a realistic establishment and see that it is filled. One officer described it to me as the need for a service dividend as well as a peace dividend.

As for guard duties, I welcome the recent news that a civilian guard force was to be created. I believe that it should have an expanded role. I did not meet one person who, when serving on guard duty, complained about having to do it. Everyone recognised the need for it but, from time to time, they complained that the duty came round too often; some said that they had not joined the Royal Air Force to spend considerable periods on guard.

We should seek to expand the civilianisation of guard duties. I cannot help wondering whether there should not also be a greater role for auxiliaries, who are at present forbidden to carry weapons in peacetime under the law. I think that the law needs to be revised. The auxiliaries are keen and the Defence Forces and perhaps, in some cases, part of the Territorial Army could well be happy to undertake the role. We must address that issue in the period ahead.

Undoubtedly, there are some difficult judgments to be made and some nice balances to be struck. At times, we have to spend to save. We all know that it is not easy to find the money to put down now to make future savings and promote efficiency in the future. However, if we find the money for new equipment and aircraft, we can save on spares. Old aircraft are expensive in terms of spares and

[Mr. Trotter]

the manpower needed to keep them flying—the Phantom is an example. The removal of the Phantom from the front line will be cost-effective; large savings will come from it.

There is an argument for having fewer and larger bases, and we could save funds by concentrating activity. However, money has to be put down in the first place to fund that concentration process. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will hardly be surprised to hear that I believe that there are good arguments for concentrating more on bases in the northern half of the country. It is easier to recruit civilians there than in the south, especially the south-east. It is easier for service personnel to afford houses in the north, where the cost of living tends to be lower and there is a higher satisfaction rate among the service community.

Above all, we must spend on the quality of life, which is not just essential for a happy and efficient service, but also cost-effective. If we do not do that, people will not stay long enough in the service, which is disruptive, removes skills and makes it costly to train replacements. Great opportunities are represented by the decisions that have to be taken under "Options for Change". I am sure that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues will plan wisely as they make major decisions in the immediate future for the benefit of the service.

It has been a great privilege and pleasure to take part in the parliamentary liaison scheme. I believe that the House, as whole and certainly the individuals concerned benefit from that initiative and so does the service. I thoroughly commend it as an enjoyable and very worthwhile experience to any colleagues who are considering applying to take part.

8.13 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I welcome this opportunity to speak in the Air Force debate. The House knows of my interest in such matters. I am astonished that, this late in the debate, no one has mentioned that this year is the 50th anniversary of the Air Training Corps, which is totally funded by the Air Force vote and budget. Many of the service personnel serving in the Gulf were ex-ATC cadets—that was certainly true of the RAF contingent. I welcome this opportunity to put that on record.

May I say to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that hon. Members have witnessed and, I dare say, welcomed the Labour party's robust defence policy in support of the Gulf operations. The hon. Member for Clackmannan has, on a number of occasions—this evening was no exception—had to take some of his colleagues to task for not conforming to Labour party policy. We recognise and applaud that.

However, there are some weaknesses, not only in the position of the hon. Member for Clackmannan, but in the Labour party's defence policy. As I understand it, the hon. Member chastised Ministers because they would not order the necessary equipment for the Royal Air Force, but he fails to persuade his Labour colleagues to agree a Labour defence policy that would require increased defence expenditure, which is what his remarks call for. Are we to believe that the voice of the Labour party is that of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen)? I hope not—I hope that it is the voice of the hon. Member for Clackmannan and, if so, that he can persuade his colleagues to call for more defence expenditure.

Recent "hot" war experience in the Gulf and a recognition of the Soviet Union's military capability, linked to possible political change, have provided a United Kingdom and NATO scenario that is substantially different from that which existed when "Options for Change" was introduced. The reunification of Germany and the less than enthusiastic support of our European Community partners for military action in the Gulf have also produced a dramatic reappraisal of who we can depend on in difficult political and military circumstances.

In the Gulf, air supremacy and control of the sea lanes, coupled with the use of new technology and smart weapons, made the war different from any previous war involving western forces and western technology. Air supremacy and superiority was important, and command of the skies was achieved by the United Nations air force at an early stage in the war.

However—it was on this subject that the hon. Member for Clackmannan and I had our earlier exchange—the question that everyone must ask is: why did not the Iraqi air force fight? The Iraqi air force had the equipment, numbers and, obviously, the ability. One could also ask why, with its surface-to-air missiles, the air force switched on its radar only to detect incoming aircraft and, having done so, promptly switched it off when the missile had been popped off. That meant that the missiles were flying blind and did not hit many targets. The answer is that the Iraqis did not have the stomach for war. It is not unrealistic to say that, because the military had just ended a relatively recent war of great attrition resembling the first world war. Therefore, it would have been surprising in any circumstances if the military had been ready to fight another battle as intensive as the one that it faced.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does not my hon. Friend think it possible that the Iraqi leadership comprehended that the allied war aim was strictly limited to the liberation of Kuwait, and that the allies would not go so far as to remove Saddam Hussein or the revolutionary command council from power? Therefore, it was important to retain a cadre of first-rate aeroplanes to rebuild the air force as an important component of military power for the peace after the war.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I was just about to move on to that point and suggest that the situation was probably a repeat of Nasser, with Saddam Hussein seeing himself coming out of the war as the unchallenged leader of the Arab world.

I am now liable, in view of what was said earlier, to be chastised by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, but I shall make some comments about the war which are important. Obviously, the airfields, radar, anti-aircraft defences, communications and command and control installations were the prime targets. They were heavily attacked and made largely inoperative by precision bombing and cruise missile strikes. In-flight refuelling and airborne early warning radar, used in conjunction with radar jamming, allowed the coalition aircraft to operate and strike targets throughout Iraq and Kuwait. We saw stealth technology for the first time, working through the F117.

The use of smart weapons at safe operational altitudes during day and night sorties to seek out and destroy well protected, hardened concrete targets and bridges provided a clear sign of the military advantage in the availability

and use of such weapons. I hope that we shall never forget that. It was those effective weapons that made it all possible.

Air superiority aircraft deployed by the United States Air Force clearly demonstrated the necessity of the availability of such aircraft in battlefield conditions. Ministers have recognised that, as shown by their support for EFA. I also suggest that we must continue to upgrade the Tornado F3. It is not a substitute for the agile EFA in battlefield conditions, but it has a complementary role for the future.

The high risks involved in accurately delivering the RAF's runway multi-purpose munitions must advance the case for stand-off weapons, which should be fitted at an early stage to the GR1 strike aircraft, which could also be adapted to take certain elements of stealth technology.

I believe, controversially perhaps, that the low-flying tactics worked. Someone had to say that. I very much doubt whether we could have operated at medium level from day one in the Gulf war—the risks to our pilots and crews would have been enormous—if the runways had not been taken out in the first few hours. Taking out the runways and radar made a massive contribution and made possible the change in tactics. Our flexibility made us successful. If we had not been able to fly low and fast in the early hours of the war, its result might have been different. A lot of nonsense is talked—we heard some this evening from the hon. Member for Leyton—about low-level tactics.

The Iraqi tactic of switching on radar only for surface-to-air missiles to locate their targets and then to switch it off again probably accounted for the low number of coalition aircraft lost. Anyone who has studied the Iraqis' equipment, and its quantity, would have expected greater losses among our aircraft. The tactic probably accounts also for some of the damage to civilian targets from falling missiles.

I wish to discuss the vulnerability of mechanised infantry and tanks when operated without air cover. That vulnerability was highlighted in the war and it must put a large question mark against the future use of great numbers of heavy tanks. Instead, helicopters and fixed-wing and anti-armour aircraft must be recognised by the MOD as a better use of scarce military funds. It was the lengthy air campaign that made the short land battle possible. The low number of casualties sustained by coalition ground forces and the few real land engagements between the two sides can be attributed to the effective and detailed planning by coalition commanders, coupled with the clever execution and flexibility of our plans—not to mention the massive air superiority of the coalition forces.

The effective anti-missile defences and the success of the Patriot system against Scud missiles constitute one of the practical lessons to emerge from the Gulf war which must call for a reappraisal of attitudes to what is known as star wars technology.

Another lesson must be the danger posed by missile systems that can deliver nuclear, chemical or biological warheads across neutral territory. The Scud missile attacks against Israel could have carried such warheads. Today, more and more nations are acquiring ballistic and cruise technology, and some of them may be tempted to use those weapons against countries that do not possess anti-missile systems. Such cases will involve help from other countries.

The use of Scud missiles against urban, civilian targets clearly showed that unconventional warheads fitted to such missiles could become terror weapons in the hands of evil dictators. The proliferation of ballistic missiles, the weapon of choice in the third world, must make that scenario a real possibility. Civilian space programmes have become the development area for missile technology, and Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, China, Pakistan, South Africa and South Korea are all working on space rockets. Consequently, control of ballistic missiles will become increasingly difficult, if not impossible——

Mr. O'Neill: I do not wish to enter into a long argument with the hon. Gentleman, but he should know that Brazil and Argentina recently signed an agreement that will prevent them from proceeding with the use of ballistic missile technology for offensive purposes. His list is slightly out of date, therefore.

Mr. Walker: That is the very point that I want to make. It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make such agreements work and stick. As more countries acquire the technology, the few that have signed may find themselves the victims of threats of attacks.That will lead to instability.

I am not one of this world's optimists. My experience in the short time that I have lived is that many people fail to honour the agreements that they have signed. Modern aircraft navigation aids and the relative simplicity of cruise-type missile technology will make the production of terror weapons with only a crude target-finding capability fairly simple. As a result, the missile technology control regime may now be obsolete. Smart weapons of the kind used in the Gulf will be in great demand, and oil-rich friendly states will expect to be able to buy the latest products from western manufacturers. In today's circumstances, such activity can be effectively controlled only by deploying western military personnel and hardware—and charging for them. Such countries were prepared to pay in the Gulf war, and they may also be prepared to pay for long-term stability if we provide it.

Anti-missile weapons systems have been seen to work and must now be a top priority for future defence spending. We should also remember that anti-aircraft guns can still destroy modern expensive jet aircraft; and stealth technology was seen in the Gulf to be effective.

What I say next may also be controversial: only Britain and the United States can be depended upon when the chips are down, and only the French in Europe can be expected to provide military support once the British and the Americans are committed. "Options for Change" should be replaced by "Options for Defence Enhancement". The Treasury should be made to accept the lessons of the Gulf and to recognise the real threat that the Soviet military and political machine represents. It must therefore sanction increased spending, since it is always less expensive to deter than to fight wars.

Orders must be placed urgently for an EFA-type aircraft, for helicopters for anti-tank and rapid deployment roles, and for Sea Kings to replace the search-and-rescue Wessex. We should also consider anti-missile defence systems and, if necessary, collaborate to obtain them. Stand-off smart weapons for the Tornado GR1 and stealth technology should be top of our requirement lists. All regular units in the RAF should in future require a reserve commitment until retirement age —anyone who joins up, for however short a time, should

[Mr. Walker]

be committed to his duties in future. That happens in the United States. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) clearly showed in his constructive speech how we can properly make use of reserves. The turnout of auxiliaries and reserves clearly showed how effective they can be. I congratulate Wing Commander Alex Dickson and his team of reserve officers who volunteered on day one of the conflict and all did their bit.

We must make use of all the equipment purchased for the RAF and the cadets. The Vigilant motor glider would make an excellent communications aircraft because it flies a damn sight faster than communications aircraft that we have used in the past, and it has a better range. We must examine ways to encourage more people to become involved in the reserves.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the United Kingdom, the United States and France can expect future calls for the defence force deployment outside what is looked upon as the natural NATO area. The United States and individual states saw in the Gulf war and in the humanitarian intervention on behalf of the Kurds that we are ready and willing, so we can expect more demands to be made on us.

It is also clear that President Gorbachev and his political allies intend to couple a consumer economy to an authoritarian political system and a command economy in the military industrial sectors. To those leaders, that seems an ideal recipe. Even if the Russia of the future is smaller than the present Russia, it will still be about 90 per cent. of the present Soviet Union, and we could see a return to age-old Russian demands for warm-water ports and expansion and the classic use of external threats to divert attention from problems at home.

I have an interest in training. I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell us tonight about experience with the Tucano training aircraft, which has now been in use long enough for a proper evaluation. Perhaps he will also tell us about female pilots and air crew who have been trained. When the Government make decisions about the future of the RAF, they should remember that it is easy to replace buildings but that one cannot easily and quickly replace airfields. One can dispose of many of the assets around an airfield, but airfields themselves should not be disposed of lightly.

Before closing any military establishment, the Government should bear in mind the fact that this is a United Kingdom Parliament and that the United Kingdom and Great Britain mean something. It should also be borne in mind that the RAF is the British Royal Air Force. Careful thought should be given before deciding to close a base in a given area, such as Wales. RAF Brawdy is more than just a base for the Royal Air Force—it reminds local people that they are part of the United Kingdom. I could also mention Rosyth, but I shall not do so because we are not debating the Navy.

It has been suggested that helicopter operations should be transferred to the Army. I spoke about jet pilots being expensive to train. A pilot with a damaged back, as I have, cannot use an ejector seat because ejection could paralyse him. Such pilots with vast experience can be diverted to other duties and, of course, helicopters come into that.

There is another and perhaps more important reason for not transferring helicopters to the Army. The RAF has developed a technical expertise in helicopters which is the envy of the world. To hand such a task to the Army would be like asking it to reinvent the wheel. Anyone who thinks that the Army has the capability to operate helicopters should compare the facilities of the two services.

I welcome local financial management as the right way forward. The RAF has also welcomed it. The modern Royal Air Force has been a professional organisation for a long time. We must not believe the fairy tales alluded to earlier by the hon. Member for Clackmannan, who spoke about battle of Britain pilots. I hosted a lunch in the House of Commons last year for some surviving pilots of that battle, and they are not the sort of people projected in fairy tales. They are like modern RAF pilots and air crew, who are recruited from all walks of socio-economic life in the United Kingdom. They are selected on ability and retained because of their professionalism, because professionalism, ability, skill and courage are the hallmarks of the Royal Air Force. That courage has been demonstrated every time that the RAF has carried out what has been required of it.

The RAF should not be thought of as a Biggles outfit. It is a highly professional organisation staffed by ordinary people and not the sort of characters that one reads about in comic strips. They are the elite of the young people of our country and we are proud of what they have done in recent times.

8.36 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): It is appropriate for this debate on the Royal Air Force to take place so soon after the service that it performed so well in the Gulf. In that conflict, more than 100 RAF aircraft, supported by many thousands of air and ground crew, carried out thousands of sorties that clearly showed the devastating effectiveness and flexibility of modern air power. Air power on its own came close to settling the conflict, proving right the advocates of air power, right back to the 1920s, who said that air power could do that.

Of equal importance is the fact that air superiority was achieved with far fewer casualties than were estimated before the conflict started, when the media said that thousands of people would be killed. Casualties on the Iraqi side were much higher than on our side, but the accuracy of the weapons ensured that there were fewer than would have occurred in any previous conflict.

The Gulf conflict gave many air and ground crews invaluable operational experience that will be of great benefit to them in their careers. It is difficult to get good operational training, and none could be better than that gained from taking part in a proper operation such as that in the Gulf. Such training occurs infrequently and it is therefore vital that lessons are learned from it. Such lessons are useful when making decisions about money, types of aircraft, and equipment as mundane as boots. As we saw after the Falklands conflict, decisions can be reassessed and advances can be made in all areas.

The Gulf war gave us a unique opportunity to test many new weapons systems. Pictures on television and reports in the media showed that laser guidance, whether directed from the ground or from the air, was highly successful in ensuring accurate targeting. The technique of runway denial was less certain and has always been a problem in the Royal Air Force. Despite the popular idea

that runways are vulnerable, they are difficult targets for any aircraft weapon. I fully appreciate what my right hon. Friend the Minister said about not yet being able to evaluate specific weapons systems. Such evaluation will have to continue for some time. Nevertheless, it is important that the RAF now looks closely at its tactics for runway denial and seriously considers tactics and weapons systems that do not require strike or attack aircraft to fly directly, at low levels, over heavily defended targets.

I do not want to take away anything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) about the effectiveness of the early attacks. I entirely agree with him. Without the Tornado and its highly specialist weapons system, we would have suffered considerably greater casualties, and we would have come up against the Iraqi air force very soon in the war, possibly with different results. We achieved tactical surprise. We prevented the Iraqi air force from getting airborne in any numbers to oppose us. As a result, many problems were avoided. Somehow, that lesson seems to have been forgotten.

The popular conception is that the Iraqi air force was never a threat. It was a threat. Many hundreds of modern aircraft, piloted by pilots who would no doubt have been brave had they been properly commanded, would have posed a significant threat to the allied war effort in the Gulf. Those early attacks by the stealth aircraft, the Tornados and other allied aircraft, but most specifically the runway denial capabilities of the Tornado, largely got over that problem. When the history of the conflict is written, that will probably be seen as the critical phase. Once that was over, it was relatively easy to predict the conclusion of the conflict, although the time could not have been determined until much later, when the extent of the destruction caused by our weapons systems was evaluated.

In that context, I want to talk about reconnaissance, which has not been mentioned so far. It seems to be the Cinderella of air forces. Different techniques are used. The Americans believe that reconnaissance can take place at the same time as the attack is going in, and that the air crew carrying out the attack can also decide whether they have destroyed the building or airfield that they are attacking. The RAF takes a different view. It believes that, while attack-type reconnaissance is useful, there is a need for special reconnaissance aircraft to go in afterwards to assess professionally the effectiveness of the attack.

The GR1A, the reconnaissance version of the GR1, was rushed into service and sent to the Gulf. It was effective not only in assessing what had taken place but in seeking, through its infra-red and other sensors, the Scud sites which caused so many problems early in the war. Again, I do not think that that aspect of the operation has been fully acknowledged. It shows the importance of the specialist role of reconnaissance, which should remain in the main stream of the tactics of air forces today and in the future. That should be developed further and we should perhaps have more Tornados with that capacity.

Less easy to evaluate was the success of the system on the Tornado F3, not because, as articles in *The Daily Telegraph* suggest, it was ineffective and did not achieve anything, but simply because the Iraqi air force never got airborne in sufficient numbers and never flew near enough to the Saudi border to pose any threat.

I was interested in the number of modifications that were quickly made to the Foxhunter radar on the F3 for operations in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. I was also interested in the reply that I got on Tuesday during Defence questions about the effectiveness of that radar. The reply made it clear that the radar now exceeded its original specification, but that that did not relate to all the radar. However, there is still concern about the effectiveness of that radar, bearing in mind its huge cost to the taxpayer and the difficulties of its procurement through different contracts.

While I am obviously pleased that the radar is better than it was, it would be useful, in the general assessment of weapons and their effectiveness to be carried out by my right hon. Friend, for him to speak, rather than to weapons systems operators, to some of the pilots and navigators who fly the F3 Tornado in this country. He could hear at first hand their assessment of the stage 1 and stage 2 improvements to the system, in order to find out whether their assessments vary greatly from those of the officials in the Ministry. I am not suggesting for a moment that they might be different, but it is important occasionally for politicians and Ministers to speak to people in the front line to find out the effectiveness of procurement policy and of expenditure.

As to the future, it is clear from the Gulf experience that the Royal Air Force needs to procure a modern, highlymanoeuvrable combat aircraft with a low radar signature. In that respect, I refer to the European fighter aircraft. The point I made earlier in an intervention stands. We tend to talk about stealth in terms of certain aircraft having it and others not having it. In reality, the position is different. Most modern aircraft have lower radar signatures than their predecessors. Most modern aircraft have some stealth capabilities.

The radar signature of EFA is considerably smaller than that of the Tornado, largely because of the composite materials used and because of certain characteristics of the aircraft itself. Regardless of the view of our German partners, the programme should go ahead on its own or with our partners. It is vital to the north-west, which I represent, because it would provide a high-tech heart for industry there. Without EFA, thousands of jobs would be at risk. Not only that, but we would not have the long-term research and development capability to develop other systems.

I wish that we could have from others, particularly some members of the Labour party, the same firm commitment that we have received from the Minister this evening and previously. In my area, I have tried two or three times to get a firm commitment to EFA from the Labour-controlled Lancashire county council, but I have not so far succeeded, nor have I got a commitment from some Labour Members in the region. It is vital to employment in the north-west, and particularly in Lancashire, that we all fight together to ensure that the project goes ahead.

The project is important to the Royal Air Force, because it would provide huge export potential. It is relatively cheap compared to some aircraft that are being put in the same category. It is also an advanced aircraft, with advanced engines and aerodynamics. It is a highly cost-effective solution to many of the needs of the Royal Air Force, and indeed of other air forces as well.

I shall now say a few words about the future organisation of the Royal Air Force. I am frankly worried about the blurring of the balance between the need to keep the defence budget this year and next year within bounds and the need specified for our long-term defence in

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"Options for Change". Earlier tonight, the exchange on the Bloodhound missile demonstrated the problem clearly. The decision on that was taken largely to save money in the short term. It seemed to provide a good solution: an elderly missile coming to the end of its useful life, so we are told, could easily be got rid of and we could save some money in the short term. However, little thought was given to this decision and what it would do to the overall air defence of the United Kingdom.

Paramount in people's minds after "Options for Change", and after we have reassessed our contribution to NATO on the continent, should be the air defence of the United Kingdom. I cannot think of any other task that the Royal Air Force will have to fulfil in the future that could be put above that need. Therefore, in a way, it is the one clear and positive RAF role, surrounded by a number of other roles, that are probably open to some doubt. That role will probably become more important, because a number of the aircraft at the moment based in Germany will return to the United Kingdom, and they will need to be defended as well.

Perhaps I am labouring this point, but it has always been my understanding of the air defence environment in the United Kingdom that it can be split into three. There is the point defence of airfields, largely looked after by the RAF Regiment, with missiles such as Rapier and various types of anti-aircraft guns. Then there are the medium-range needs of air defence, out to 60 or 70 miles, or, in the case of the Bloodhound, even up to 150 or 200 miles in certain cases. The air defence of the United Kingdom or, more specifically, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, in that range has been carried out by the Bloodhound missile. Indeed, I can remember well, in the 1970s, Bloodhound missiles being withdrawn from Germany and Cyprus to fill what was then considered to be a gap in our air defence.

Interestingly, we then had two fighters, the Lightning and the Phantom, that could be considered capable of filling that need. They were relatively short-range aircraft, certainly in the case of the Lightning, and in the case of the Phantom highly manoeuvrable. Following the decision to scrap the Bloodhound at the end of this year, we have a highly effective short-range air defence system, a highly effective long-range air defence system in the form of the Tornado F3, but, as far as I can see, nothing in between.

Air Commodore Day gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence as recently as last month. He was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) about this problem. My hon. Friend said:

"That is well understood but what I have difficulty in understanding is you as a professional Air Force officer, accepting a four-year gap with nothing. Are you happy about that?"

Air Commodore Day replied:

"No, we are not happy but I think one has to say that is the situation we have ended up in and where we believe it is not cost-effective to run on Bloodhound."

Well, it may or may not be cost-effective to run on Bloodhound but it is cost-effective to run on something; it must be more cost-effective to do that than to leave this gap. Whereas the Lightning and the Phantom had the capability to operate in this air defence gap relatively effectively, although not effectively enough to fill that role in the eyes of former RAF chiefs when they withdrew the Bloodhound from Germany to the United Kingdom, the Tornado F3 is not the aircraft to fill that gap, because it has been specifically designed to do something else. It is a long-range interceptor and it is not as highly manoeuvrable as the Phantom and the Lightning, in certain instances. Most important of all, if it, or its radar, has a shortfall at all, it is in short-range combat, for which it was not designed.

I hope that when my hon. Friend is winding up, he will promise to give serious consideration to looking closely at the possibility of shrinking that gap, which now looks as if it is inevitable, and procuring a missile which I believe is essential for one of the primary tasks of the Air Force, whatever else is decided as a result of "Options for Change".

Apart from air defence, a number of other roles will also be important to the Royal Air Force. We have heard quite a lot tonight about the strike attack Tornado, the GR1. I have mentioned briefly the GR1A, the recce aircraft, but the GR1 has a great length of life ahead of it. Its one shortfall has been its short range. One of the lessons of the Gulf is that equipping it with, ironically, the long-range tanks originally specified for the F3, has made it a much more effective aircraft. That, coupled with the flight refuelling capability, which is being enhanced, should mean that that aircraft has many years of useful life ahead of it. As with stealth, which I mentioned briefly earlier, there is the possibility of adding on things to reduce its radar signature further and give it an operational life well into the next century.

There is one thing lacking, however, and that too has been mentioned tonight: a stand-off weapon capability, and not just a short-range stand-off capability, so that the aircraft is able not only to take out runways into the foreseeable future but to fulfil its primary role of strike more effectively. I am talking about an air-launched missile, either nuclear or conventional, with a range of at least 200 or 300 km. With that capacity, that aircraft will remain effective well on into the next century. Equipped with some of the smart weaponry that we have seen working so effectively in the Gulf, it will provide an excellent weapons platform with an excellent performance. We must not forget our commitment to, and the importance of, the concept and development of the Harrier, which can take off over a short distance or vertically. In the years ahead, the Harrier will provide a more effective means of delivering air power than will aircraft that take off and land conventionally.

I want to refer to another interesting lesson that has been learnt from the Gulf war. The Iraqis, indeed, like NATO in western Europe, built considerable numbers of concrete shelters. Countries put their aircraft inside those shelters, thinking that they were safe. To realise how untrue that was, one had only to look at some of the magazine and television pictures of holes in the sides of extremely strong concrete shelters, inside which bombs had caused devastation. In other words, such shelters, far from providing protection, acted as traps. It is highly significant that the Iraqis decided that the one means of getting round this problem was to tow aircraft off airfields and park them beside hospitals, houses and anything else that might deter attacks on them.

Long ago, of course, the Harrier embodied the concept of dispersal. I envisage the development of that aircraft in a supersonic mode, with smart weaponry and, possibly, stealth characteristics. Of course, it is very difficult to combine short take-off and landing and vertical take-off

and landing capability with stealth capability. If it can be done, however, it will provide the sort of aircraft that will see us well into the next century.

Here, too, we have demonstrated the need for a highly efficient research and development base on this side of the Atlantic. In our decisions about what to do in this sphere, we shall have to be quite ruthless. We shall not be able, as we were 10 or 15 years ago, to spread our research and development effort widely. It would be too expensive to do so. We shall have to be highly selective in deciding which sectors it is critical to keep in this country, or on this side of the Atlantic, and then go for those sectors. I suspect that many of them will be in avionics and electronics. With the shrinkage that must take place in the size of the Air Force, we shall have to spend on research and development capability—I stress the word "capability"—a high proportion of whatever money is made available for defence so that we may be able to react quickly to a change in circumstances, a change in perception, or a change in the sort of weapons that a potential aggressor may be able to develop in a short period.

It is important to think about the overall system for weapons. Let me refer to a problem that we have had in the past. An air-launched weapon system is made up of three or four parts—the airframe, the engines, the avionics, and the weapon. These tend not to be developed together. Perhaps the developers get the airframe right first, and it flies around with a lump of concrete in the nose. Indeed, that has happened occasionally in recent times. Then the engine is developed to its full potential, and, rather belatedly, the avionics make an appearance. Finally, the weapon system has to be strapped on, and the various parts have to operate together. In future, we shall have to ensure that the whole system works properly.

Next to my notes I have written "Foxhunter". I do not want to say anything about that, other than that it is a classic example of a highly successful airframe doing the job that it was designed to do, but also of an aircraft whose radar, so critical to the F3's role, fell behind, and did not meet the specifications—indeed, in some instances, it was slightly inferior to the radar on the Phantom. That sort of thing results in the downgrading of an entire weapon system. Until a whole system comes together, taxpayers' money is wasted.

Unless we are careful, we shall be in danger of falling into this trap in the development of air-to-air weaponry. I do not wish tonight to deal in any detail with the transatlantic agreements for the development of long-range and short-range air-to-air weapons. However, we may have been here before. We go along with a bargain and agree to buy the other nation's product. I am thinking in terms of helicopters in relation to the French, as well as our willingness to go along with the American side of the transatlantic bargain. When it comes to the Americans' agreeing to our having design leadership on this side of the Atlantic, things get a bit wobbly. Perhaps, they say, it is not such a good idea; perhaps they will simply develop the Sidewinder missile further—which, I understand, they are thinking of doing.

I shall say only that I have a shrewd suspicion that, if we were to come back in two or three years' time, the United States would be offering us that modernised Sidewinder—or, indeed, a brand new short-range missile that it then decided to develop, following our initial loss of capability to produce any sort of air-to-air missile. It is important that we maintain our capability to develop air-to-air missiles further, if that is necessary. That is one of the critical sectors into which I feel we must put research and development funds in future.

We must not, however, forget the other roles played so well by the RAF in the recent and, indeed, the distant past. Earlier tonight, reference was made to the Hercules, which I believe has now been in service for about 24 years. It must come to the end of its useful life quite soon. I fully accept what my right hon. Friend the Minister said. It is very easy for Back Benchers to list all the aircraft that need to be replaced, but it is not so easy to find the money to replace them. I am not suggesting that we should go out and procure a replacement for the Hercules; I am merely saying that this is an interesting aspect of aviation.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Americans clearly understand the shift that pushes research development money spent on military matters towards helping their commercial aircraft programmes. Every aircraft that Boeing has produced over the past 40 years—until the development of its latest model, the 777—has been funded largely by the Department of Defence. It is interesting to note that when, for the first time, Boeing had to decide to develop a new aircraft itself, it took an awfully long time to do so, and then decided that the only way in which it could afford it was to bring in partners from outside—the Japanese, for instance.

In the development of new transport for the RAF, I see a direct spin-off for this country and, indeed, for the European aircraft industry. That should not be lost on us. We are in heavy competition with the Americans, and, I suggest, we shall be in equally heavy competition with others in the future—in the business of what are now lucrative returns, but will remain so in the long term only if we are prepared to put down a substantial amount initially.

There is a synergy between the development of new transport aircraft for the RAF and the development of new airliners for our airlines in this country and abroad. Although there is slightly less synergy, there are also similarities between the need to develop a replacement for the Nimrod and the parallel circumstances in commercial aviation.

The decision on Nimrod is rather different. I think that I am right in saying that the avionics are rather ahead of the airframe. The avionics that will go into the EH101—as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said at length, and with great knowledge—is ahead of the game; it is the most effective anti-submarine avionics in the world. It could, indeed, be suggested that the role of the maritime force in the RAF could—in part at least—be met by a helicopter-borne force. That might be one solution. None the less, we shall have to look at either re-engineering or heavily modifying the Nimrod force. It should be borne in mind that the design goes right back to the Comet, so there is a big question mark over whether it can be allowed to continue much longer or whether we shall have to go for a brand-new aircraft.

Here again, we are talking about possibly a twin-engined aircraft with perhaps not the same capability as the Nimrod, bearing in mind what I have said about the use of helicopters and the fact that the Nimrod was produced, or at least developed, at a time when Britain still had a role in many parts of the world where it is no longer as important for us to have a presence. It may be that we can get away with a smaller airframe, and it may be that

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that would form part of the same sort of development programme that would go into the development of a STOL transport plane. There is a similarity there, and if that is looked at closely enough, it will be seen that there will be a lot of synergy with the development of civilian aircraft.

Earlier tonight, a couple of my hon. Friends mentioned training. That is an interesting subject, for a number of reasons. First, I think that the jury is still out on the effectiveness of the Tucano. It was probably, on balance, right to go for a turbo-prop trainer, but I am not fully convinced of the arguments that it was quite as cheap as was said at the time.

There is a trade-off between an aircraft such as the Tucano and the one it replaced. It goes more slowly than the one it replaced and does not fly as high, and as a result, the amount of training that can be done on it in preparation for the next stage of training on the Hawk is a little limited on the edge of the flight envelope. It is important for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Department accurately to assess the benefits of Tucano training, going on to the Hawk afterwards, to see where the crossover point is and to ensure that we are not effectively comparing apples with oranges, saying that the Tucano is much cheaper to operate than the Jet Provost because it can be turned round quickly, does not use so much fuel and is a much simpler aircraft, and then finding out in a year or two that it is necessary to increase the length of the Hawk course. As soon as that is done, any saving that was made is rapidly diminished. I am not saying that the decision to go for turbo-prop training is wrong, simply that it is not quite as efficient as has been made out.

I spoke briefly earlier about the EH101. That helicopter programme is important. It has been on the stocks for some time. A decision has still not been made to procure it either for the Royal Navy or the Air Force. In terms of its role for the Air Force, I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that it is the only viable solution. There is a lot of discussion about whether it would be better to buy a few Chinooks and perhaps the Black Hawk. However, I understand that the Black Hawk suffers from the rather ecentric disadvantage of not being able to accommodate a guardsman with his helmet on. I do not know whether that is a relevant point to take into account on the procurement of a helicopter to transport troops across the country or across Europe, but I suspect that somewhere in the Ministry of Defence, something along those lines will be written suggesting that that is an important reason for not buying the Black Hawk.

The EH101, particularly with its RTM322 engine, is a highly effective helicopter. It has been expensive to develop, but it seems to fulfil many of the needs of the Navy and the Air Force. It may not fulfil them all, but it would be a mistake to procure one aircraft for the Navy or the Air Force and then to decide that it does not quite fit the bill and that something else should be procured. If experience is anything to go by, having taken a decision, the Air Force—and to a lesser extent the Navy—has quite a reputation for changing its mind a year or so later and for looking rather enviously over its shoulder at what the other service possesses and deciding that the alternative would be better. In that regard, the Navy had the Buccaneer first; rather belatedly, the Air Force accepted that it was an extremely good aircraft and procured it. Conversely, the Navy realised that it could continue to use the Harrier when the larger carriers were cancelled under the Labour Government.

I now want to consider the future organisation of the RAF. We have an opportunity with "Options for Change" and the changes in our relationship with the eastern bloc nations to consider closely the way in which the RAF is organised. The Binbrook scheme for the organisation of RAF stations dates back to the early 1950s. Binbrook station has sadly shut, but if nothing else, that shows the length of time that the scheme has been running. The scheme has three prongs based on an operational wing, an administrative wing and an engineering wing. Is such a scheme right for the 1990s?

Are we not spending a little too much money on the support services and in particular on the administrative wing? In this age of modern technology, could we not get by with slightly fewer wing commanders on station, for example looking after station headquarters? What about the number of ranks in the RAF? There are about 11 ranks in the service. Is that too many for a shrinking force? Surely that is too many for a level of management and command necessary for a force that will soon be reduced to 60,000 or 70,000 personnel.

Should we not consider closely whether we can get away with fewer personnel, particularly in the higher ranks, who spend a high proportion of their careers across the road in the Ministry of Defence? Should we not consider more closely the ratio of people on operational stations, engineers servicing aircraft and the number of people in administration back here in the MOD? With our commitment to NATO reducing in terms of numbers, I am absolutely convinced that we can probably make do with a slimmed-down command headquarters and a greater proportion of the RAF based where the action is—next to the aircraft.

If I have any worry, it is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire explained, there will be a conflict between the Treasury's desire to make cuts in the RAF everywhere and anywhere and the desire of the RAF hierarchy to resist those cuts. If we are not careful, we will end up with the worst of both worlds—an unbalanced force that is heavily bureaucratic and unable to intervene effectively to support our legitimate interests wherever they may be. That must not be allowed to happen. Knowing my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement as I do, I strongly suspect that he will not allow it to happen.

9.19 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Despite the attractions of the local government elections, we have had an interesting and substantial debate tonight, and that is to the credit of all those who have participated. It is also a timely debate. Last year, the Royal Air Force debate took place during the 50th anniversary of the battle of Britain. Although I did not participate in that debate, few of those who did would have thought that, within 12 months, the RAF would again be in action and our young service men and women called upon to risk their lives in war, once again against a brutal dictator.

I add my tribute to those that have already been paid to the skill and courage of the pilots, the ground crews and

the associated support services. We must include in that tribute the headquarters, the civil service and the families. In particular, we pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in the fight for justice and against tyranny. I know from the tributes that have already been paid that I speak for the whole House in sending our condolences to the families. The country owes them a great debt. We are proud of them and we are grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge our debt to them.

I did not visit the Gulf. As I listened to the speeches tonight, I increasingly came to the conclusion that I was the only Member in the House who did not do so. At one stage, I began to wonder how the aircraft managed to take off in what must have been an extremely crowded area. Never in the history of human conflict have apparently so many visited such a small place in so short a time.

Although I did not visit the Gulf, I subsequently visited RAF Germany, and spoke to some of the air crew who had been involved in the war. I was impressed by the determination and sacrifice of all those involved, including those who had remained at home and, as the Minister said, done without free time and time with their families for many weekends, over many months, so that they could provide the support necessary for the effort in the Gulf.

Not having visited the Gulf is only my first disadvantage. Another is that many of those who have spoken tonight have far greater personal experience than I of the matters that we are discussing. That is partly because many of them are older than I am, and partly because of their service in the Royal Air Force in particular, and in the armed forces in general. A number of speeches were based on that personal experience, especially that of the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), to whom I listened with great interest. His speech was of some length, but necessarily so as there was some substance in it. He made a thoughtful speech.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) gave us a valuable insight into the Gulf, and an especially valuable insight into the potential of our reserve forces. I have read our previous debates, and the hon. gentleman's speech tonight was very much in keeping with his previous speeches. At the risk of ending his career, I recall that last year my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) suggested that the hon. Gentleman would do well to assist the Ministry of Defence as an adviser.

The hon. Members for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) made important points, although I am not sure that the suggestion of the hon. Member for Tynemouth that guard duty should be hived off to the reserve forces, whether the Territorial Army or the Royal Air Force Reserve, would be effective in assisting recruitment. Nor am I sure that the confidence in the reserve forces shown by hon. Members on both sides of the House is necessarily reflected, according to rumour, in some of the options being considered by the Ministry of Defence, especially for the Territorial Army. That has been sufficiently alarming to cause a number of hon. Members to demand Adjournment debates on the matter so that they can outline their fears.

The hon. Member for Tynemouth praised the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I endorse that, as someone who spent a month, not with the RAF, but with the Army. I found that experience valuable, as I hope did the armed forces.

Not surprisingly, one of the main issues in the debate has been the lessons that can be learned from the Gulf war, as has correctly been mentioned by several hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), for Ruislip-Northwood and for Wyre and by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). It is precisely because of the sacrifices made by our service men and women that an even greater burden than usual is placed on those of us who must ultimately ask for that sacrifice when we seek to examine with great clarity and care the operational aspects of Operation Granby.

I do not underestimate or diminish the might of Iraq's forces which, surprisingly, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) seemed to do. It is unfortunate that he is no longer in his place. I do not underestimate the potential power that then lay within the armed forces of Iraq. The House will not be surprised if I express my amazement that such an underestimate was made tonight, because the people who are now telling us in retrospect that we were too hard on the poor Iraqis are the very people who spent the previous six months warning us that the body bags would be coming home and that blood would flow through Iraq in rivers because we were taking on one of the strongest armies in the world. Consistency is helpful in approaching such matters.

No one should seek to diminish the power of the Iraqi armed forces and thereby the determination, courage and accomplishments of our forces. The allied air campaign during the Gulf war was one of the most successful in history. I take issue again with my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton: notwithstanding his comments, I believe that that air campaign was probably also the most precise in history. To be perfectly truthful, I wish that some of the siren voices that were raised during that difficult time about the horrendous possibilities of endangering and damaging the shrines in Iraq were now wailing as loudly about the fact that, without any recourse to conscience or religious sentiment, the Iraqi dictator has laid bare not only nations within Iraq but its shrines and places of worship.

The allied air losses were astonishingly light. The RAF lost six aircraft in combat—all Tornados—out of a total of 4,000 combat sorties. As has been said, once it was pinned to the ground, the Iraqi air force ceased to pose a serious threat, and the Iraqi planes that eventually took off flew to Iran. We must remind ourselves that that was precisely because of the RAF's activity in the initial period, and no doubt was also due to the quick learning processes of the Iraqi air force. It learned that, when facing the RAF and the United States and allied forces when they were in that mood, discretion was often the best part of valour.

We are indebted to the hon. Members for Wyre and for Ruislip-Northwood for mentioning the calculated political decision that was taken by the revolutionary command structure and by Saddam Hussein himself to play a long game and to preserve intact some elements of his forces.

Those facts are a testament not to the lack of vitality or potential power of the Iraqi air force or army, but to the superior quality of our pilots and the technology that they employed. Nevertheless, valuable lessons can be learned by assessing the air campaign, especially about the use of low flying. I admire the courage with which this matter was

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referred to by several hon. Members, including the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East and the hon. Member for Wyre, because I believe that we have a duty to reappraise our tactics as carefully as possible. That duty is all the more arduous and important because lives were lost.

The issue of low flying is a tactical and legitimate question and we should not demean it by suggesting that it is treasonable or indicative of splits within the parties or the House to question whether it is tactical. We must reappraise low flying not because that tactic was necessarily wrong or foolish, far less because it was known to be so in advance, and certainly not because it was ineffective—we can all accept those three premises—but because we have a duty and an obligation to inspect and to examine tactics whenever and however lives are lost.

Five of the Tornados that were lost in action were lost during the first week of the air campaign. It is not yet apparent whether low flying was a major contributory factor in those comparatively high losses. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East referred to other factors which may have been involved. But it is surely no coincidence that when the RAF tactics were varied and Buccaneers were deployed to provide laser targeting from a higher altitude, the attrition rates dropped. It is also significant that, having sustained the loss of two combat aircraft in the first hours of the war, the United States navy abandoned low flying within 24 hours.

I do not argue that low flying should be discarded as a tactic. It can offer a pilot an important element of surprise. The delivery of the JP233 runway denial weapon undoubtedly played a significant part in achieving the air superiority which was necessary and ultimately saved hundreds, perhaps thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of lives. But a legitimate question can be asked about the extent to which we can continue to rely on low flying, especially in the context of a protracted war. We all agree that, even if the same intent and capability remained in the Soviet Union, a blitzkrieg attack from that direction would not be possible. We would face a protracted war, with the continual need to go back to runway denial. That is the context in which we should examine the need for low flying.

We knew in advance, and the Gulf war illustrated in practice, that there was a variety of other ways in which enemy air defences could be penetrated, such as use of stealth technology, electronic jamming of radar, anti-radar missiles and stand-off missiles that can be delivered from outside enemy air space. We should encourage the professionalism of the RAF to ensure that the most comprehensive appraisal can take place.

Can the Minister tell us this evening whether the options to which I referred are being studied by the MOD? I say that in advance lest I list some questions and at the end the Minister simply says that I am asking him to give a positive response to them all. I am not doing that. However, I should like to know whether at least some of them are being thought about and that somewhere along the line there is at least the prospect of a decision being taken on the occasional question that we raise.

Can the Minister tell us whether future RAF specifications will include stealth features—a matter raised by several hon. Members tonight? Has any consideration been given to developing a runway denial weapon with a stand-off capability? That specific point was made by the hon. Member for Wyre. When asked about the matter earlier, the Minister said that the question was premature. That is a word to which I shall return later. I hope that we shall have at least some initial response, because the matter is important.

I am sure that all hon. Members present agree that, within financial constraints, the RAF should be allowed to keep pace with technological change. Many developments seem to point the way to the future in the light of the practical experience of the Gulf war. It is also important that the RAF has available to it a broad range of options in addition to low flying. It should not run the risk of being a one-club golfer. For those reasons, we urge a reappraisal of the degree to which we rely on low flying.

As several hon. Members have said, although the Gulf and other out-of-area operations are important, by definition they are supplementary to the prime function of the Government and the defence structure—the defence of the United Kingdom. I wish to raise three matters that give rise to considerable anxiety and which several hon. Members have mentioned this evening. The first is the Tornado F3 and its replacement. It has become apparent that the main threat which the F3 was originally designed to combat—the heavy bomber—is in the process of being supplanted. In those circumstances, a more agile and manoeuvrable aircraft is required.

Perhaps just as worrying are the rumours that the F3 has already developed airframe fatigue problems. That matter was raised by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood. Perhaps the Minister will confirm or deny those rumours. Whether they are true or not, the new circumstances point even more directly and urgently to the need to bring the European fighter aircraft into service as soon as possible. Many hon. Members mentioned the doubts about German participation. I am sure that we were all extremely pleased to hear the Minister give a strong commitment to the House on Tuesday that we would proceed with EFA even if the other partners withdrew. At least, I hope that my interpretation is correct. The assumption has been drawn by several hon. Members and I raise it to allow the possibility of its being denied, in case it was what was referred to earlier as the intellectual raffishness of the Minister.

We are told that the European fighter aircraft is set to enter service by 1998 or 1999, three or four years later than our original requirement. May we be assured that the latest deadline will be met, and perhaps the Minister will provide, on a scale of degree of confidence, the level of confidence that we may have in the latest deadline.

The much-discussed and vexed question of Bloodhound has been a recurring feature of today's speeches, and the issue was put well in context by the hon. Member for Wyre; I hope that my references to him will not mean that I am ending his career quickly, too. In some ways, Bloodhound seems symbolic of the way in which the Government are perceived to have approached a number of problems.

In last year's debate, when asked about a replacement for Bloodhound, the Minister—never someone to rush things—said:

"It would be premature to go into this matter in any detail."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1990; Vol. 168, c. 291.]

Now, little more than a year later, we are told that the Bloodhound surface-to-air missile is shortly to be withdrawn from service, but will not be replaced by a new system for about four years.

I find last year's comment amazing in the context of the recent decision. It appears that the Government consider such decisions premature when they are only three years late, but somehow to be timely when they are four years overdue. The Minister said tonight, in the face of all the evidence, that there was no gap. Admittedly, he said it from a sedentary position, but that should not reduce his commitment to his expression of feeling on the subject.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House do not agree that there is no gap. Nor does Admiral Doe think there is no gap. Indeed, I suggest that there are two gaps. First, there is a gap in time and, secondly, there is the gap between Bloodhound's capability and our requirement for an adequate surface-to-air missile. The gap has grown so wide that it would apparently be better to have nothing until we can procure a replacement. That is just as disturbing as the delay, for apparently it is better to have no defence than to disturb the idle tranquillity of the procurement Ministry.

My amazement about this was exceeded only by the Minister's comment tonight that, as he put it, Bloodhound is only guarding a few Americans. That was one of the more spectacular statements among a long list of spectacular statements by the Minister. I also find it the most spectacular procurement error, judged even by the spectacular standards of the Minister. Why was it not possible to anticipate Bloodhound's obsolescence in time to replace it, if not immediately, timeously? The only answer that we have been given is that it is doing a job that is not worth doing. We hope that that was not meant to be because it is guarding a few Americans. If it is doing a job that has been worth doing, why was not the decision taken some time ago, in view of its obsolescence, the length of time it has been around and the apparent foresight that is claimed in other matters? I hope that the Minister will not find the question overly premature.

A number of hon. Members referred to IUKADGE, the improved United Kingdom air defence ground environment. It has been the subject of a comprehensive and detailed report by the Select Committee on Defence. We know that when it finally enters service, the improved UKADGE is intended to provide the RAF, for the first time, with a complete picture of the United Kingdom air defence region in real time. As hon. Members have said, it will also bring us into line with NATO's command and control system.

Having been procured in the late 1970s, the improved UKADGE was intended to enter service four years ago. The four-year delay seems to be a favourite just now. It is still not ready, and it seems unlikely to be ready in the near future.

Taken separately, those three issues—the air defence fighter, the absence of a replacement for Bloodhound and the shortcomings on the improved UKADGE—would probably not be of great significance. But taken together, they add up to serious and potentially disastrous shortcomings in British air defences. However, the Government seem remarkably casual.

In view of the time, I shall make only one general comment about "Options for Change". A great worry, shared by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, is that, despite detailed deficiencies in the policy, it has been approached in a piecemeal, finance-constrained fashion, rather than with analysis, followed by the consideration of defence needs and the deployment necessary, within the context of finance, as outlined very well tonight by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East.

I worry about that, because the point was made last year by the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), when he said that we had a chance to take a fresh approach to the matter. He made the plea that we should not, in examining our needs, simply say:

"Let us take away a squadron or two, or a brigade, or a division and reduce the British, German or Dutch contribution."

The hon. Member for East Hampshire, who is knowledgeable on such matters, was giving sound advice. Tragically, he seems to have predicted with remarkable quiescence and accuracy the piecemeal approach adopted by the Government.

The future defence of Europe arises out of "Options for Change." The Government's position on that, particularly the Minister's, is just as confusing as on "Options for Change". In one of the classic ironies of such debates, he spoke last year in unequivocal and laudatory terms of our "robust and healthy institutions—the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation . . . the Western European Union and the European Community"—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1990; Vol. 168, c. 284-302.]

Despite my relative unfamiliarity with the Minister, I understand that he has not always been the greatest supporter of the EC. Since he praised the robust institutions of NATO and the WEU last year, he has, in a personal capacity—admittedly semi-detached from the Government—declared NATO redundant and is, I understand, apparently not too happy with the WEU. It appears that the robust and healthy building blocks of future European security of last year have withered unhealthily on the vine since. It would be useful to know where he thinks the future of the European defence force and structure lies.

There are many other issues that I cannot speak about in detail, including the WE177, the NATO identification system, on which the Minister said very little, and female pilots in a combat role, about which the Minister expounded at great length last year but did not mention tonight. How successful has been what the Minister last year called the imaginative package for better-qualified youngsters? How are we getting on with the 10-year programme to update and modernise the accommodation of families and single people? All those issues affect the quality of life, which was mentioned earlier but, amazingly, by only one hon. Member. On the military side, I could also mention the light attack helicopter, the EH101 and a number of other factors.

We do not ask for a decision on all those matters tonight, but we would like——

Mr. Mans: Just one.

Dr. Reid: Yes, just one would suffice, as the hon. Member for Wyre says. We should like a sign that, at some stage, a decision might be taken on one of them. I have spent all evening trying to avoid the cliché "dithering", but that cliché can be killed stone dead tonight by picking the 40 decisions that have apparently been waiting to be made for years. I hope that it is not premature in every case to make a decision.

The Government and the Minister owe those answers not only to the Opposition and the House but, above all,

[Dr. Reid]

to the service men and women and their families, without whom all the technology, sophisticated machinery and aircraft are as nothing. They, more than the Opposition and the House, have been failed by the absence of detail and it is they whom we can least afford to fail.

9.43 pm

Mr. Alan Clark: Tonight's debate has been distinguished by a number of well-informed contributions. Many hon. Members who have participated have contributed from deep personal knowledge of the topic. For that reason, it has been a valuable debate. I express my appreciation to my hon. Friends for staying behind for my winding-up speech, because I know that they have many preoccupations outside the Chamber today.

A common thread throughout the debate has been the tributes and expressions of gratitude and appreciation to all members of the Royal Air Force for their recent performance in the Gulf war and for the duties that they continue to undertake, including the latest challenge that they are meeting in the mountains of northern Iraq. I am certain that those tributes will be a great encouragement to them. One of my hon. Friends mentioned the letters that members of the forces were receiving from civilians whom they did not even know. The letters were sent out to the region during the conflict, and we have been told how valuable they found them. It is always encouraging and good for the services to receive expressions of support from the population at large, as has been amplified in the House by those of us who represent them here.

I shall do my best to answer most of the points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I appreciate the implied compliment that the two sharpest members of the Opposition Front Bench have opened and wound up this debate, in contrast to their benign but somewhat inchoate colleagues, the hon. Members for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) and for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), who have not turned out tonight. That gives an added edge to our debate this evening.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) raised the important question of the stealth factor in the design of future aircraft. We are at an early stage of considering that factor. Stealth can mean two things: stealth against radar or stealth against infra-red detection. To combine the two is not easy. As the hon. Gentlemen knows, the advanced short take-off and vertical landing aircraft is a distant project that we are considering. That is an aircraft that will come after EFA. It is at an early project design stage, but certainly the stealth factor must be considered in that. In all serious combat aircraft from now on, there must be a stealth element, but the extent to which it combines radar and infra-red is far in the distance.

The hon. Gentleman asked about low-level attacks. Many hon. Members have expressed misgivings about those. In his robust speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that, in the Gulf war context, low-level attacks were critical. In the early days of the Gulf conflict, when we had the only air force capable of positive runway denial on Iraqi airfields and we did not know that the Iraqi air force would pack up and leave the theatre, it was necessary to make such low-level attacks. A number of very brave men risked their lives repeatedly to do so. Naturally, once the operational situation had changed and the Iraqi air force had left the scene, it was possible to operate at different altitudes. However, there is a general feeling that a stand-off weapon of some kind will be produced in the next generation. It is perfectly proper that the House should be discussing this subject.

The Tornado F3 fatigue problems were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and others. At one time, it was thought that those problems would be serious and would involve an expensive rectification programme. I am glad to say that it now seems not to be the case. Although routine fatigue rectifications will have to be undertaken, they are not of a catastrophic dimension but are part of the routine maintenance of the aircraft.

As for EFA, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North put into my mouth words supposedly uttered in Tuesday's defence questions which the *Official Report* will not substantiate. I should be very glad if we made this aircraft even if all our collaborative partners dropped out, but at this stage that is pure hypothesis—it has not been costed, and we do not know who will stay in and who will drop out. It is no more than an assertion of principle, to say that the aircraft is needed by the RAF; and we very much hope that it will enter operational service on the predicted date. I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) assure the House that it will be cheaper to make EFA if Germany drops out. I wish that I thought that were true. Indeed, it may be true. We may find out whether it is, but the basis on which my hon. Friend made his calculations was not immediately apparent to me.

Some hon. Members made a great deal of the so-called gap that will ensue because we have decided to take Bloodhound out of service. Our judgment was that it had reached the end of its effective operational life, having been put into operation in 1964. It is not up to the modern range of electronic counter-measures that can be arrayed against it. Taking out of service a system that is ineffective does not create a gap—that is so obvious that it hardly needs to be said——

Mr. O'Neill rose——

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman seems to be getting fidgety; does he want to intervene?

Mr. O'Neill: Perhaps the Minister can explain why, on 28 February 1990, he told the House that a decision on the future of Bloodhound was premature, yet within 14 months it has become obsolescent to such a degree that a decision can be taken to abandon it without replacement.

Mr. Clark: The answer is self-evident: 14 months is a long time—in politics, it is an eternity.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) asked us to jump the gun in our conclusions on various weapons systems, but we have to consider them in terms of their overall performance as assessed in the campaign. In the fulness of time that assessment will be made available to the House, and I doubt not that an interesting debate will follow.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the successor to the WE177. We are considering both United States and French options. A right decision is more important than an early one. I was particularly interested in the contribution by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), who advocated more strongly than I have yet

heard anyone do the importance of this system, of finding a satisfactory solution for it and of the role that it is likely to play in future decades when it may be necessary to resist nuclear blackmail if the threat of a strategic ballistic strike would be inappropriate but it is nevertheless necessary to deter a nuclear conflict at a different level. The hon. Gentleman's exposition of that was exemplary——

Mr. Wilkinson: He should come and join us.

Mr. Clark: I do not want to get into that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) asked about a campaign medal, and I am glad to be able to confirm that Her Majesty has been pleased to give permission for a medal especially for service during the conflict.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire urged an early strategic plan for the future of our forces. The Committee that he chairs has been active in investigating all aspects of the contingencies that may touch on such a plan. He should appreciate that we must take account of many factors that remain uncertain: developments in relations with the Soviet Union, progress in arms control, consultations with allies and lessons from the Gulf. All those matters will have to be included in a new strategic overview. Many uncertainties inhibit a clear and coherent strategic approach.

I agreed with practically all the excellent speech by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who spoke about the contractorisation of search and rescue. We have had an approach on that topic but do not propose to take any action until the "Options" study has been completed. I appreciate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) that this could involve the use of helicopters not made in the United Kingdom, and we shall pay attention to that additional factor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) spoke about fatigue on the Tornado F3. I hope that he will accept the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Clackmannan. My hon. Friend made a valid point about the need for maritime patrol aircraft to be replaced or greatly overhauled and enhanced in the next decade. I agree, but the position is not made easier by the fact that the Lockheed P7, at which we looked closely as a possible replacement for the Nimrod, will no longer be made.

It was said that perhaps we could use a twin-engined aircraft with a slightly lower performance. We have time to consider that, because the Nimrods are performing effectively. They are equipped with advanced avionics, and there is no immediate urgency to replace them. I was asked about plans for a replacement of the C130. The C130 is a strong and durable aircraft and continues to give good service. I do not think that a single C130 operated by a western air force, such as the United States, Great Britain or Germany, has ever been lost as a result of a mechanical defect. As I say, it is one of the best and most durable aircraft ever made.

In an interesting speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) reminded the House of the need for a wide range of aircraft, and said that it was impossible for the RAF to carry out its many tasks with just two or three types. He also spoke about the increasing dominance of the helicopter. As they become more and more dominant in certain areas there is a need for a wide range of different types, such as transport and attack helicopters.

I should like to correct my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who is not in the Chamber. He deplored comments about the performance of our allies during the war and said that an official had spoken about them running for the cellars. I do not think that an official said that; I seem to remember that it was an hon. Member. It may have been a member of the Government, and I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East called for his resignation. As he is not in the Chamber, he cannot confirm that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said that we had only eight Chinook helicopters for battlefield support. That is not so. There are more than 30, and 12 of them are presently in Turkey. He also spoke about the EH101. Work to assess the first phase of project definition is not complete and we cannot analyse the results of that work until all the lessons of the Gulf war are to hand. It has to be considered in the whole context of helicopter procurement and what helicopter we select to do which task. Certainly I take the point that he put to the House and that he based his advocacy on remarks made by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North paid an excellent tribute to the Air Training Corps in its 50th anniversary year. It is a completely worthwhile organisation supported by committed and loyal members of the community. I am grateful for the eloquent way in which he drew attention to it.

My hon. Friend also asked about the Tucano. So far 52 have been delivered to the RAF. I am pleased to tell him that it has greatly impressed both instructors and pupils.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTORY PENSIONS FUND

Ordered,

That, in pursuance of section 1 of the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1972, Mrs. Marion Roe be appointed a Managing Trustee of the Parliamentary Contributory Pensions Fund in the room of the late Sir John Stradling Thomas.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

PETITION

Brechin Infirmary

10 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House a petition on behalf of the general practitioners, community council and citizens of Brechin and district, protesting against any major rundown or closure of general practitioner facilities at Brechin infirmary. Over 3,200 people, more than half the population of Brechin, and the equivalent of one signature for every family in the town, wish to voice their protest and to speak up for general practitioner services at the infirmary.

The petition states:

That there is extreme concern about the proposal from the Angus District Management Unit of Tayside Health Board to close the upper wards of Brechin Infirmary, thus reducing the general practitioner bed complement from 34 to a proposed 21, and that we believe that this cutback induced closure will not only be hopelesaly inadequate to provide the level of service felt necessary by the general practitioners but that closure of the second of the three floors in the Infirmary raises severe anxieties about the future of the hospital and the services it provides for our community.

That record of Brechin Infirmary, with its comparatively favourable bed occupancy, length of stay and range and outcome of treatments, with 79 per cent. of patients discharged back into the community after an average stay of 30 days and with almost all of the patients being over 70 years of age, shows that resources are being used well.

That since most patients prefer to be looked after in their own community by their own GPs whenever possible, GP beds in 'Cottage Hospitals' are an extremely cost-effective way of looking after patients as well as being popular with both patients and relatives who would otherwise find visiting very difficult and we consequently believe that the policy of running down Cottage Hospitals to achieve short-term savings is short-sighted, financially silly and extremely unpopular with patients particularly the more elderly and disadvantaged.

Wherefore, your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge Tayside Health Board to upgrade facilities at Brechin Infirmary and retain the maximum possible services available locally for the citizens of Brechin and district.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Disabled People (1986 Act)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.3 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity for this debate, albeit short and inadequate, on a very important subject. I am grateful also to the Minister for Health for her presence.

The House will know that there is great concern among the sponsors of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 about the Government announcement that sections 1, 2 and 3 will not now be implemented, which comes after the earlier decision not to implement for the time being section 7.

The Minister for Health will know that I certainly was not happy—and I know that this is true of a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends—about the manner of the announcement. Although I do not intend to dwell on it, even if the Prime Minister had responded to two planted questions in the way that many of us believe took place, I do not think that that was the way to deal with an Act which managed to get on the statute book because of the spirit of all-party support, which I do not think the announcement and the manner in which it was done reflected. Certainly there were two questions—one from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and one from the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth). I am bound to say that at one stage I was going to offer each of them a pint to produce a question on this subject in this Parliament, but I think that that would have been unfair, and my reputation for meanness would have remained intact. But I am not sure that that is the best way to deal with a subject of this kind.

There is extreme anger and disappointment among 6·5 million disabled people in this country and their advocates and carers, who for the last five or six years have looked forward to the implementation of these sections and who are now profoundly hurt and disappointed. I have received petitions, which I hope to present next week, on behalf of some of the villagers in my own constituency, and in the town of Coatbridge. People there have been following our procedures, and they cannot understand how we can be so cynical as to put on record such an important Act and build up the hopes of people with disabilities and then later simply say that these will not be implemented.

In case the House thinks that I have orchestrated these petitions, may I say that I have received letters from many parts of the country, including yesterday two letters from the Isle of Wight, which were quite unsolicited. That is an indication that there are very strong feelings on this issue. Those feelings are reflected in the views of voluntary organisations—I am sure that they have been made known to the hon. Lady—such as the Spastics Society, MIND and the Act Now group, which involves about 40 organisations concerned with disability.

Yesterday, I heard a very eloquent but angry speech by Sir Brian Rix on behalf of MENCAP. He fully understands the importance of the decision not to implement these sections. That anger is shared by local authorities. I speak now after 10 o'clock, and I do not know what their political complexions are, but they participated in trying to bring this legislation into being through consultation after consultation with Minister

after Minister, and they felt that the Government were sincere in saying, as they did, that these sections would be implemented.

I do not believe that the House has received an explanation for an extraordinary decision by the Government. Certainly, in the written replies which the hon. Lady has published, we are told that these sections have been overtaken by the Government's own National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and even by the Children Act 1989. I find that quite astonishing. I followed the debates on both those Acts very carefully and served on both the Standing Committees, and I recall nothing specific about advocacy and representation—certainly not in the Children Act.

I have met nobody in the social services and social work in Scotland in recent days who takes the view that Government legislation in any sense comes anywhere near what the 1986 Act was attempting to achieve in terms of advocacy, representation and assessment.

What the Government have done means even more dependence on the complaints procedure, but we are supposed to be talking about community care, a partnership. I understand that the hon. Lady was speaking about that very issue on the BBC a few minutes ago.

But there is not a partnership when entitlement that is provided for in the 1986 Act is not provided for in subsequent legislation. There is no prospect of partnership when the Government deny what was clearly identified as an opportunity for people to seek their rights in terms of advocacy and representation. Where those do not exist, I do not see how we can have the kind of partnership to which the hon. Lady has referred.

Community Care, which has played a very important role in respect of these matters, published a leader headed "Final Solution?" It said:

"section 50 of the Community Care Act (to which Mrs. Bottomley specifically referred) relates almost entirely to the complaints procedure which local authorities must have in place by April. The Disabled Persons Act went far beyond this. It recognised that disabled people might need an advocate at any stage in their dealings with the Social Services Department, to help them put their views and case.

The existence of a complaints procedure is surely a poor substitute for the wide-ranging, one-to-one advocacy envisaged under the 1986 Act."

Those are important views. However, perhaps much more important than even these considered opinions are the views of the organisations of and for people with disabilities. For example, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation said this:

"The National Health Service and Community Care Act does not give disabled people the absolute right to authorised representatives or the absolute right to make known their needs before an assessment is carried out, to know what the social services will provide to meet those needs, or why they will not meet needs, and the right to a review of their assessment."

That is the difference between the Government's legislation and the provisions of the 1986 Act.

These views were not expressed by a single, albeit important, organisation; they are shared by Age Concern—to which I shall come in a moment—Deaf Accord, National Citizens Advocacy, south Birmingham area, and many other advocacy groups, National Citizens Advocacy, the Spastics Society, MENCAP, the Scottish Care in the Community Group, the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped and many other organisations. It is at our peril that we ignore such important views—the views of people with disabilities and of those who care for them.

It is important that we should place on record the views of a number of organisations, if only because they are representative. In a letter to me, Age Concern said:

"As you know, Age Concern England shares your disappointment at the Government's decision not to implement these sections. Advocacy schemes have clearly demonstrated how authorised representatives can help frail, chronically sick and disabled or confused older people by representing their wishes and interests accurately and sensitively . . .

The Government have put financial constraints before the rights of disabled older people to make their wishes known and to have a guarantee that the services they receive are those which best meet their needs."

Deaf Accord said this:

"Deaf Accord is extremely upset and worried about the Government's decision not to implement sections, 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons Act."

The hon. Lady may have thought the other day that I was being a bit provocative when I responded to her comment that the lion's share of the Act had been implemented. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that you had to keep us in order. The point that I am now making is that, in the absence of advocacy, the Act remains a lion without teeth. Of course I welcome those sections that have been implemented, and do not wish to diminish the importance of the legislation. But here we have Deaf Accord telling us that one of the very important sections to have been implemented—warmly welcomed by that organisation and by me—is weakened because of the absence of advocacy. Deaf Accord goes on to say:

"Section 3 includes the provision of any services that may be necessary if a disabled person (or their authorised representative) is unable to communicate orally or in writing. The implementation of this part of the Act is absolutely essential for many profoundly deaf people who can only communicate in Sign language. Without the provision of a Sign language interpreter many deaf people are denied the right to participate in their assessment. This means, for example, that deaf school leavers do not have the right to an interpreter when being assessed under Section 5 of the Act."

National Citizens Advocacy, south Birmingham area, said:

"the dropping of these important sections has angered and frustrated us all within the Citizen Advocacy movement . . . However, whether it is through Citizen Advocacy, Self-Advocacy groups or some form of paid representation —what is vitally important must be that the principle of authorised representation is recognised and established in law, as of course it is in many other countries."

National Citizens Advocacy said:

"Mrs. Bottomley stated that the Department is giving financial support to a number of voluntary organisations which assist disabled people through the provision of advocates. This number is very small indeed, and in some cases health authority grants to citizen advocacy schemes have not been granted or renewed . . . This situation is full of irony, and will have tragic consequences for disabled people."

Finally—while I am quoting the strongly held and considered views of organisations involved in disability —let me point out that MIND drew attention to the Law Commission's consultation paper, stating:

"The Law Commission's consultation paper No. 119 entitled 'Mentally Incapacitated Adults and Decision Making: an Overview' recognises the necessity for a scheme 'to avoid the gaps, fragmentation and confusion of responsibility which exists under the present law' . . . It is our view that the government estimated £18 million to establish and run a formal system of authorised representatives would be a small price to pay for guaranteeing a basic human right."

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

The other day, the Minister and her colleague, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health—the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell)—answered questions that I had tabled, hopefully, in preparation for tonight's debate. As can be seen from columns 42 and 43 of the *Official Report* of 29 April, the Ministers first had to answer my question about the meaning of the 1986 Act in terms of representation and advocacy and the number of people involved. We observed a clear distinction between the precise reply that the hon. Member for Loughborough was able to give and the vague reply that the hon. Lady gave; not because that was what she wanted to do, but because she was clearly basing her reply on the Government's legislation—which is itself very vague, and certainly not nearly as detailed as the 1986 Act in regard to the points with which I am dealing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—the hon. Member for Loughborough—referred to the number of people with learning difficulties. He said that 25 per cent. would require representation—people with physical disabilities, elderly disabled people, people with dementia and those with sensory impairment. He actually gave a figure—which the hon. Lady was not able to do on behalf of the Government. That figure—144,000—does not seem much when we remember that there are 6·5 million people with disabilities in this country. The House of Commons recognised that, as did the other place when it passed the Act unanimously.

What we learn from the answers to those questions is that it would cost £40 for each authorised representative each week—about 75p per person, which is surely not a colossal amount. Representation is a right, especially if we mean what we say about community care. Time after time—as I have been reminded this week—decisions are being made for people with disabilities, often by local authorities and bureaucrats. Advocacy would have given those people access to the decision-making process, which I believe has been denied to many people, and will continue to be as long as the relevant sections of the Act remain unimplemented.

Under the 1990 Act, assessments will be made only when a local authority decides that it "appears" necessary. Surely community care should go well beyond that, and involve the rights and the needs of the client and the services that should be provided, with proper assessment involving advocates where they are in place. The absence of that means that decisions about the quality of life for many of our people, for the elderly, including disabled elderly people, for the physically disabled, for carers and for advocates themselves, are being taken by people who happen to have power, a power which is not always shared or used in the best interests of the consumer.

That is why I believe that the Select Committee on Social Services was firm in recommending to the House that, if we genuinely believe in community care in practice, sections 1, 2 and 3 of the 1986 Act, as well as section 7, which deals with persons being discharged from long-stay psychiatric hospitals, often into the community without any preparation being made for them, are absolutely vital if we are to begin to address the problems that are out there in the community.

In recent days, since we apparently take the view that people with disabilities should have a say, I thought that I would take the opportunity to listen to what some advocates have to say, and I shall conclude on that note. I am sure that the Minister will curb her impatience; it will not take too long.

I visited Southwark disablement association the day before yesterday, where I met a number of interesting and inspiring people such as Ben Clarke and John McGowan, but in particular I met a woman called Biray. She was in a wheelchair, and the head of a single-parent family with two children. She said that she went to her advocate, John—happily, advocacy exists there; the best practice that we want to see spread throughout the United Kingdom—who happened to be sitting in the room with us because she did not think that anyone listened to people such as her; she was just another person on whom sometimes people even hung up on on the telephone. She was wise to go to her advocate, because he managed to negotiate with the social security office, where it was discovered that she was being paid £16 less than her entitlement on income support. He was also able to ensure that she was put on the list for special housing in the docks area, much to her pleasure and to his.

It is interesting that her advocate was himself in a wheelchair, showing that advocacy can go far wider, involving self-advocacy as well as citizens' advocacy and professional advocacy, in order to give community care real meaning.

I met too in Islington Jean Willson, the chairman of Islington MENCAP. She has a daughter, Victoria, who is now 20, with severe learning and physical disabilities. After a lifetime of dedication from her mother, Victoria is now in her own little bungalow. But the kind of dedication that we see there would have been helped considerably by advocacy.

I end by referring to Mary Albert, and Gerald Coyle, in my constituency, to whom I have referred previously. The parents' commitment there to a young man with learning difficulties is colossal. They fervently hope that we mean what we say about advocacy, because they want to know what will happen to Gerald after they have gone. That is a question that many people have asked, but they will not get a response until we implement fully the sections that we are discussing.

10.23 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I have listened with sympathy and considerable respect to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), but in the examples that he gave at the end of his remarks he demonstrated so effectively the way in which the philosophy and thinking behind the 1986 Act are already being taken up and incorporated in good social services practice throughout the country.

I recognise that our decision not to implement those sections, at least for the time being, has caused considerable disappointment. The hon. Gentleman is reluctant to be persuaded that the provisions of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, which are so dear to his heart, could be and have been overtaken by a major initiative mounted by this Government. In our implementation of care in the community, there is no doubt that the spirit and the principle of the 1986 Act have been developed and elaborated upon to ensure that the many frail, vulnerable

and disabled people in the community have their services provided in that spirit of partnership that has so shifted our thinking about the provision of support.

The programme "Does he take sugar?" has a message for us all. The principles enshrined in the 1986 Act have profoundly changed our views of the welfare state. We have moved away from the paternalistic provision of services to a spirit of partnership.

Many of the provisions of the 1986 Act have already been established. However, the hon. Gentleman wants us to move further and faster. Our community care reforms are the most fundamental and wide-ranging measures to be taken in the area for many years. I very much hope that the substantial benefits that they will bring to all those affected by aging or disability will receive wider recognition and understanding.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to harness the enthusiasm, lobbying and commitment of the many groups that have supported the 1986 Act and ensure that that energy is translated into support for the implementation of care in the community. As local authorities carry forward their community care plans and move forward with specific work on assessment and guidance to fully implement community care, I hope that they will have the active involvement of local voluntary organisations and the disabled themselves.

The hon. Gentleman is aware that the White Paper "Caring for People" makes it clear that we would not at the moment implement section 7 of the 1986 Act. That is partly because we have a major programme to provide support for the mentally ill in the community. The specific grant established on 1 April this year, resources amounting to £155 million over the next three years to provide support for the mentally ill and the establishment of care programmes with collaboration between health and local authorities to ensure that a group that both the hon. Gentleman and I would agree have not traditionally achieved the practical and effective support required in the community, will all make a substantial difference.

More recently, we reached a similar decision in respect of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the 1986 Act, which concern the appointments and rights of authorised representatives of disabled people and the rights of disabled people to make representations. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument that the establishment of complaints procedures, a requirement from 1 April this year, does not make a significant difference to those receiving the services.

More fundamentally, it is a requirement that, in drawing up community care plans, users' and carers' interests should be considered. Furthermore, in the establishment of assessment procedures, where we have already produced the policy guidance and where we will now produce the practice guidance, there is clearly a role to promote and encourage advocacy schemes.

We help to fund the National Citizens Advocacy, Skills for People, Barriers into Action and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf in carrying forward their guidance and support to local authorities in implementing advocacy schemes. I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's example of an advocacy arrangement that he witnessed yesterday. I was present in my constituency last week to see the initiation of the commissioner of social service users and carers working to promote advocacy schemes.

I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and others concerned about how we can use the spirit of those principles, in identifying, in the practice guidance that we are now preparing on assessment, how we can further encourage and promote schemes that we both agree should ensure that the wishes, interests and needs of the user are properly recognised and understood.

We did not take the view that this was the time to introduce a statutory, formal, bureaucratic, uniform administrative procedure. It is not only a question of costs, which I think the hon. Gentleman will agree are notoriously difficult to assess: much more that, when there is such a great movement to the full implementation of community care, it is not the time statutorily to introduce this part of the hon. Gentleman's Act. I do not want him to underestimate the impact that his Act has had on our change of thinking and on the work being done to improve services for those with disabilities. The range of sections, and the work that is continuing as a result of them, is legion.

There has been a report to Parliament on the care in the community of the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped. Earlier this year, we had reports from the social services inspectorate about the work being done to ensure that those leaving school were properly prepared for the community. The Children Act 1989 ensures that, for the first time, children with disabilities will be under the umbrella of children's legislation, and their needs and interests recognised.

We are aware of the importance of information schemes. Only recently we helped to fund the national disability information project, so that those with disabilities have knowledge of and access to the range of resources in the community. There has been a profound culture change in this country, so that the needs of disabled people and all those who would benefit from community care are now viewed in a profoundly different way.

I should regret it if the hon. Gentleman felt that there was any discourtesy in the way in which the decisions have been announced. That was not the intention of any of the Ministers involved. I wish to make it clear that the all-party disablement group, the Act Now group, and the many voluntary organisations that have made a magnificent contribution to advancing improved care for the disabled, will continue to have an open door to my Department. We want to ensure that all the principles in the hon. Gentleman's Act are developed in our community care implementation. I call on him and on all the groups with which he works to work with us to ensure that community care is a success. As we turn policy into practice, we want to ensure that those larger groups of people in need of support in the community receive the help, partnership and assistance that is so important.

We have a major implementation programme; we have the largest increase in spending on social service departments for 15 years; we have a raft of policy guidance. We need the good will of the hon. Gentleman and everyone else to ensure that those policies are the success that he and I want them to be.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 3 May 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

VALUE ADDED TAX (OVERCHARGING)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths, supported by Mr. Thomas McAvoy, Mr. Harry Cohen, Dr. Norman A. Godman and Dr. John Reid presented a Bill to make it an offence to charge value added tax at a higher rate than that in force at the time of supply of the goods or services upon which the tax is charged: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May and to be printed.—[Bill 153.]

Orders of the Day

Property Misdescriptions Bill

As amended, (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

9. 36 am

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): It is with great pleasure that I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill formerly entitled the Estate Agents (Property Misdescriptions) Bill. Significantly and fortunately, with unanimous support, the title was amended in Committee to widen the remit of the Bill and to provide even better protection to the public against significantly false or misleading descriptions by estate agents and others who are engaged in the practice of marketing property.

Despite the significant amendments agreed in Committee, it was reported in the *Estates Times* that the Committee sat for seven minutes. That is somewhat of an overestimate. I made a very short speech, after which the amendments were agreed, as were the clauses and schedules. It is evidence of the great good will that has been shown to the Bill throughout its passage through the House that the Committee stage was completed so rapidly.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the contribution to the birth of the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). I have often referred to myself as the foster father of the Bill and to my hon. Friend as the natural father. Having seen the amendments to the Bill, I believe that the appropriate analogy is that I feel like somebody who has borrowed a fairly standard motor vehicle which, when I have given it back, has not only many extra mod cons, and a great deal of extra paint and chrome work, but a new engine. My hon. Friend is delighted with the progress of the Bill. He had hoped to be with us this morning, but, unfortunately, he is not yet well enough. We expect that he will join us next week, and we all send him our best wishes for a permanent and speedy recovery. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

The amendments made in Committee were a response to the suggestions in the constructive Second Reading debate just under two months ago. The aim of the Bill is to strengthen the position of house buyers and potential house buyers against misleading or false descriptions of property. It is unequivocally a consumers' measure, and I pay tribute to the Consumers Association for assisting me in introducing it.

I emphasise, as I did on Second Reading, that the Bill has the unanimous support of the property profession, because it bolsters the position of responsible estate agents and others who market property at the expense of those who are sloppy and who do not check their facts, thereby giving the property profession a bad name through their cowboy activities. The general secretary of the National Association of Estate Agents wrote to me:

"I believe that the Bill, as amended, is a victory for commonsense."

Unlike the Estate Agents Act 1979, with which it dovetails, the Bill covers the legal profession. I was therefore pleased to receive a letter from the Law Society of England and Wales, which said:

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"The Law Society therefore believes that the Bill strikes the right balance so far as it applies to solicitors."

Part of my business life has been spent in property development and building and I believe that it is important that the Bill should strike a balance between rigorous protection of the consumer and being acceptable to the property profession.

The Bill is popular on both sides of the House. Hon. Members realise that, hitherto, the most important purchase of a person's life—a house—has not been protected from misdescriptions to the same extent as the most minor purchase—a penknife, for example—which would be protected by the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and that it is sensible to cover the purchase of a house with a measure that is akin to that Act.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) dealt with this point forcefully on Second Reading. I mentioned the anomaly whereby, if somebody bought a do-it-yourself gas appliance which was not in situ in the house, it would be covered by the Trade Descriptions Act and would have to be accurately described. As the law currently stands, however, if the appliance were in situ in a house, it would not have to be accurately described.

Every year, 900 cases of property misdescription are reported. Since the Committee stage, I have heard of some which illustrate the efficacy of the Bill. A correspondent in Addlestone in Surrey pointed out that he was about to buy a house in Bourneside road, Addlestone, which was described as having a detached garage. My correspondent then discovered that there was no right of way to the garage, so he would have been unable to use it. The property was also described as being within walking distance of the station. The property was in Addlestone, but the station was in Weybridge. One would have to be a walker of Olympic dimensions for that description to be accurate.

A gentleman from Cambridge raised another important issue. He said that the description of the house that he wished to buy stated three times—therefore with some certainty—that the property benefited from 1·25 acres of land. Expecting to find a large amount of land around the house, he visited it, with all the inconvenience and cost that that involved, only to discover, after further investigation, that the house benefited from only 0·7 acres. The agents had exaggerated the size of the plot to the tune of over 80 per cent.

My third correspondent lives in Bristol. The agents stated that the roof of the house that she proposed to buy was new. It turned out that the roof was old and needed major repairs costing £3,000. My correspondent felt that the agent should not have described the roof as new. The agent apologised, so I would not class him as one of the deliberate deceivers or cowboys who are a small minority of those marketing property. Nevertheless, the damage was done to my correspondent's pocket.

The most serious case occurred in Frithville, Lincolnshire. A gentleman wrote:

"In February 1987 I purchased a property which was advertised by two agencies in this area as being in superb decorative and structural condition. I moved into the property in May 1987 and in June the property was declared structurally unsafe and liable to collapse at any time. Having paid £34,000 in May I have estimates for £55,000 worth of works which are required to make the property safe."

I should have thought that that case alone convincingly showed the need for legislation so that at least the possibility of such problems being experienced again were minimised.

I have taken time to emphasise the type of problems that the Bill is designed to minimise, but I emphasise again that such problems are caused by a minority of poor agents and that, in my experience, the majority of people involved in the property profession attempt to do their job properly. Unfortunately, as in other areas of life, 95 per cent. of problems are caused by 5 per cent. of the people.

I told the property profession that I wished to ensure that the legislation dove-tailed with, rather than duplicated or, even worse, contradicted, regulations to be made under the Estate Agents Act 1979, to which the Minister referred on Second Reading and which, I am delighted to say, he has laid before the House. The regulations do not cover property misdescriptions so the Bill, if successful—as I am sure we hope that it will be—will be able to do its job in that regard. I have explained to people in the property profession that we are not in any way attempting to restrict a legitimate richness of language—that is the best way to describe it—in property marketing. Clause 1(5)(a) and (b) cover falsehoods and misleading statements. It is significant that, even if a statement is false, it must be false to a "material degree" and that, if a statement is misleading, although not false, it must be misleading in terms of

"what a reasonable person may be expected to infer from it, or from any omission from it."

The Bill does not cover possible interpretations of the word "panoramic", but relates to statements that are misleading and false to a material degree.

Clause 2 gives responsible estate agents the defence of "due diligence", which is identical to that in section 39 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and similar to section 24 of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. The clause will protect professionals who may have been misled—deliberately or otherwise—by their clients who are not covered by that defence, as I explained on Second Reading. The defence of due diligence will be available to property professionals who had taken all reasonable steps and had reason to believe that the information they were given was accurate.

An issue that I mentioned on Second Reading, which is not specifically covered in the Bill, but about which there is a great deal of case body law under the Trade Descriptions Act, is that of disclaimers. We had to strike a balance. We did not want to allow disclaimers to be so wide that they would negate the purpose of the Bill—for example, if an agent issued a set of particulars with a disclaimer so that one had no idea whether they were accurate. That would have made the position worse rather than better.

However, nor did we wish to deny responsible property professionals the opportunity to put disclaimers on facts that they had no way of being able to say were true or false. The example usually given is the age of a property—it may be said to date from the late 18th century but the information is significantly misleading if it turns out to be much older or more recent. As long as they have taken reasonable steps to verify the information, they may add a disclaimer to the effect that they have no documentary evidence to support that claim. Although such disclaimers are not in the Bill, they would be acceptable in case law.

However, the Bill has teeth and will provide a criminal sanction punishable by a fine for the irresponsible property professionals who make statements that are misleading or false to a material degree.

I said that I would explain the ways in which the original Estate Agents (Property Misdescriptions) Bill was widened in Committee. When I first considered the measure, it appeared that, although valuable, it was too limited in scope. It initially covered only estate agents who were engaged in the sale of residential property. Therefore, many people engaged in the marketing of property—for example, commercial property—would not have been covered.

In Committee, we tabled amendments designed to extend the scope of the Bill to people involved in property development. I had and still have a great interest in that aspect, as I said then and as I have again said today. It seemed grossly anomalous that, under the original Bill, someone could pick up a set of particulars for a house from an estate agent and he would be protected from false and misleading descriptions, but if he picked up exactly the same particulars direct from a builder or from a property developer he would not be covered. The particulars would look similar, so the anomaly needed to be remedied.

People engaged in the refurbishment or building of a property will now be covered by amendment No. 1 to clause 1. That amendment extended the measure to other significant professionals engaged in the marketing of property, the most significant of whom are solicitors. There was a great deal of pressure and reasoned argument on Second Reading for including solicitors within the Bill's remit. The measure encapsulates solicitors by removing their exemption under clause 1(2)(a) of the Estate Agents Act 1979.

A number of arguments were made against including builders and developers. The National House Building Council and others argued that they already operate schemes that offer compensation to purchasers who have been misled over the particulars of a property. I doubt whether that compensation would have been adequate to compensate the gentleman in Frithville to whom I have referred. In any event, those arguments rely on a comprehensive coverage of the industry. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission recently examined the 95 per cent. coverage of the housebuilding industry exercised by the NHBC and decided that there is a case for opening the industry up to competition to ensure that its role is not so comprehensive.

Competition will ensure that builders and developers provide the kind of guarantees currently provided by the NHBC and other validating bodies. It will also happily fit in with the new regime encapsulated in this Bill. The most powerful arguments for including builders were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham said that builders more than anyone else know about site conditions, previous land use and land charges on a property. They are therefore better able to describe a property accurately than is someone who has been instructed to act on it.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West said that it was only right that someone with a 100 per cent. interest in a property rather than someone with a 1·5 per cent. or 0·75 per cent. interest—or whatever the commission level is—should be required under the measure to make accurate descriptions of the property when it is being marketed.

We then had to decide how wide to draw the scope of the people covered by the Bill. The words "wholly or substantially" appear in clause 1(5)(f). In other words, a statement is made in the course of property development business if, and only if, it is made in the course of a business concerned "wholly or substantially" with the development of land.

We included that provision in response to arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) on Second Reading. He argued that if a greengrocer, who may well be a world expert on certain kinds of fruit, but not an expert in marketing property, decided to market his commercial property, it would be wrong to subject him to the criminal sanctions in the Bill. The words "wholly or substantially" cover people who are principally concerned with the marketing, building or refurbishment of a property.

It was said that banks and building societies should be included in the measure. To a certain extent, the line on whom one should or should not include in the Bill is subjective. Many banks and building societies have subsidiaries that act as estate agents and therefore will be caught within the terms of the Bill. However, neither I nor the Consumers Association has been able to discover one case, despite the fact that there are 900 reported complaints every year, in which a bank or building society was complained about. The fact that they are not included within the scope of the Bill will not create a loophole in the protection of consumers.

I have already referred to the inclusion of solicitors. The Law Society of England and Wales supports the measure. I have also had discussions with the Law Society of Scotland, because 85 per cent. of property transactions in Scotland are carried out by solicitors. In England, 250 solicitors engage in estate agency services.

There was initial concern about whether conveyancing services had been properly drawn to allow solicitors to produce property information forms before the conveyancing procedure. It was argued that solicitors did not want the property information forms to be regarded as marketing material which might be caught by the Bill and therefore might get in the way of the streamlined conveyancing procedures that the Law Society has rightly, and so constructively, introduced recently.

I have been able to reassure the solicitors on that score. Clause 1(5)(g) defines conveyancing services as

"the preparation of any transfer, conveyance, writ, contract or other document in connection with the disposal or acquisition of an interest in land, and services ancillary to that".

Clearly, the initial preparation of particulars on a property information form will fall within that definition and be regarded as conveyancing services. They will therefore be outwith the scope of the Bill.

That means that we are excluding them not by virtue of what they are, but by virtue of what they do. If a property information form used by a solicitor, who also acts as an estate agent, in the course of marketing a property, was not simply used as preparation for conveyancing, but was given to a potential purchaser as proof of the details of a property and an inducement to view the property, that property information form would then be regarded as being used as part of the marketing of the property, and it

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would fall within the Bill's remit. Nevertheless, the Law Society believes that the Bill strikes the right balance about solicitors.

There were a number of arguments in favour of excluding solicitors from the terms of the Bill. I do not think that the first argument was strong, because it could be applied to any profession that exercises some self-regulation. Merely because a profession regulates itself—however rigorously—is not sufficient reason to exclude it from broader legislation designed to protect the public, where Parliament and the public think that appropriate.

The Scottish Law Society has argued—in my view it is a slightly esoteric argument, although the society thinks that it has substance—that solicitors should be regulated sui generis, although it agrees with the substance of the Bill and that solicitors should come within its remit when they are acting as estate agents. The society also argued that it was clumsy to exclude an exclusion and that it does not want solicitors to be drawn into the ambit of the Estate Agents Act 1979. I think that my arguments are reasonable and I hope that Scottish solicitors will view them as such.

First, the drafting is mot clumsy—it is shorter and more precise than that suggested by the Scottish Law Society. Secondly, there does not seem to be an inviolable principle that people who regulate themselves and are generally dealt with under specific legislation should be outwith other legislation, should Parliament think it appropriate. The Financial Services Act 1986 contains provisions that apply directly to solicitors acting as financial advisers, rather than those provisions being applied through the self-regulatory organisations, just as the Bill will contain provisions that apply to solicitors acting as estate agents or marketers of property. Therefore, I do not think that the Bill breaches a significamt principle on self-regulation and the legislation under which solicitors or any other profession operate. Once the Bill becomes law—as we all hope that it will—I thimk that they will find that they are able to work within it comfortably and sensibly.

Mr. Patrick Ground ((Feltham and Heston): Before my hon. Friend moves on to a different subject, will he answer one question? He is expllaining why he amended the Bill to allow for the case of the ignorant greengrocer—who is knowledgeable about fruit but ignorant of property. Does he agree that often the only knowledge of defects resides in the owner of a property? Does he have any worries about having excluded the owner of the property and having imposed upon those marketing it a higher duty than that placed upon the owner?

Mr. Coombs: I am glad that my hon. and learned Friend has mentioned that subject. On Second Reading, I emphasised that the Biill's purpose was to extend to the marketing of property provisions that exist for virtually every other group under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. The 1968 Act covers only those people marketing goods or services in the course of their trade. It does not extend to private individuals, just as this measure does not extend to the householder.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Perhaps I can give an helpful example to the hon. Gentleman. When I was canvassing for the locall elections yesterday, I was handed a copy of the *South Wales Evening Post*, which contained a huge advertisement for David and Roy Thomas and Company, a local agent. It contains an advertisement for a house which is described as

"REDUCED FOR QUICK SALE: . . . well presented . . . The property has been well maintained".

The person who handed me the advertisement had looked at the house a couple of months before, had gone to the expense of having a survey carried out, was told that there were £10,000-worth of dry rot and roof problems in the house and had turned it down. I telephoned the agents before I came to the Chamber and asked whether the work identified by that survey had been done prior to its readvertisement. None of the work had been done, yet they are still presenting information about a property that they know to be wrong, on the basis of a survey paid for by someone else. They are calculatedly and deliberately misleading people.

Mr. Coombs: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that example. He will be pleased to know that I quoted him approvingly in earlier parts of my somewhat lengthy speech.

I shall briefly put to bed the arguments about why private individuals are not covered. As the Trade Descriptions Act argues that the law should impose a greater standard of care and professionalism on people whose business is the marketing of goods and services—or in the case of this Bill, is "wholly and substantially" the marketing of property—we feel that that principle should be extended to the Bill.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the real answer to our hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) is that those who advertise and seek to market property present themselves as having a property expertise that the owner frequently does not have? They are making themselves out to have the same expertise as those who market package holidays so misleadingly and as those who so misleadingly put National and Local Government Officers Association advertisements in local newspapers during local election campaigns.

No doubt my hon. Friend will be aware that a child in my constituency was described as frozen, going to a school that was leaking and had other defects, but the advertisement should have said that that child went to a school in the borough with the best A-level results in the country. That sort of misleading advertisement should be punished. I congratulate my hon. Friend on producing a Bill which will punish those who produce misleading property advertisements with the expertise that they claim to have. Surely the Bill is very positive and he deserves the congratulations of the whole House and not merely the dozen or so hon. Members who are here.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend is extremely generous. I am sure that I do not deserve his congratulations, but the people who have been involved in bringing it about do.

The third area to which the Bill has been extended in Committee, as a result of arguments on Second Reading, is commercial property. Those arguments were most convincingly and comprehensively made by my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester (Mr. French)—I wish to spare his blushes, and he will no doubt have one or two things to say about the Bill in a moment—and for Faversham.

The idea of extending the Bill to commercial property had general support on Second Reading, although a number of arguments against including commercial agencies were suggested, which were not very convincing. Before dealing with them, it is reasonable to say that the way that the original clause 1(3) had to be drafted would have caused some confusion and problems. It said that residential property would be included because it was covered by the original Bill by virtue of the use to which an agent could reasonably expect a property to be put by the potential purchaser. That would lead to several anomalies. One would have to look into the minds of people who market property to discover whether a property could reasonably come within the scope of the Bill, or whether it would be outside the Bill. The original definition was problematic, so it was best to eliminate the clause altogether.

The first argument against including commercial property was cost. A small minority in the commercial property profession argued that professionals would be put to a great deal of extra expense as a result of being required to provide particulars that were not inaccurate, false or misleading to a significant degree. I do not accept that argument. The vast majority of responsible commercial practitioners already ensure that the statements they make are accurate. They are prepared to undergo the cost of doing so, and they understand the legal implications of what accurate statements involve. They would not be inconvenienced by the new measure.

The second argument against including commercial property was that people who were engaged in the purchase of commercial property had professional advisers and were generally in a position to protect themselves through the civil code; therefore, they did not need the protection of the criminal code vis-a-vis property misdescriptions. One need only hark back to the small greengrocer mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow to realise that, just because one buys a shop or other piece of commercial property, above which one may well live, one is not necessarily in the Onassis or Niarchos class of property buyer. Therefore, people should be protected by the law.

I was able to inform the property profession that the Bill related only to prescribed statements. It is not cast more widely. My hon. Friend the Minister has undertaken that there will be consultations with the property profession before regulations under the Bill are introduced. The Bill will cover only areas in which, with reasonable effort and preparedness, an agent or property marketing professional could avoid making misleading or false statements.

The Bill is not framed in such a way as to necessitate a full survey on any property that a professional markets. To do so would effectively extend free surveys to every potential consumer of commercial or other property by virtue of the criminal law, and that would be wrong. It would unnecessarily weight the measure far too much in favour of the consumer and against the property professional.

Thirdly, the property professionals wished to ensure that the treatment of commercial property should be consistent with that in the provisions of the Estate Agents Act 1979 if it was included in the Bill. That Act covers commercial property. The element of consistency between the two pieces of legislation, for which the property professionals have argued, would be maintained.

I should like to conclude my rather long-winded remarks——

Mr. John Marshall: Never.

Mr. Coombs: At a meeting to which I spoke recently, I was told that when I said "finally" I meant that I would continue for another 20 minutes. When I said "in conclusion" I meant that I would continue for another half an hour. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for my colleagues, I cannot promise to repeat my performance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West has done the House and potential house and property buyers a great service by introducing this important measure. Equally, he has done a great service to the responsible property professionals of the nation by ensuring that their values of integrity, accuracy and responsibility to their clients are rewarded at the expense of people who are just in the business for a fast buck and make statements that may move property but result in problems such as those identifed in letters to me from which I quoted earlier.

The original Bill's scope was too narrow. Support has been given by organisations and individuals who will come under the scope of the Bill by virtue of the amendments made in Committee. The British Property Federation is an example of an organisation that covers the builders and developers. The Law Society has spoken for solicitors. The Solicitors Property Bureau specifically deals with solicitors who are engaged in the sale of property and other estate agency activities. The support of those organisations shows that the balance is right and that we have ensured that the Bill serves not only the consumer but responsible property professionals.

I thank the organisations that have given support, especially the Consumers Association, but also the National Association of Estate Agents, the Institute of Valuers, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Law Society of England and Wales, the Law Society of Scotland and other organisations and individuals who have been of assistance to me.

I must also thank—although possibly sotto voce—Government officials who have been supportive and gave the Bill the necessary parliamentary time to reach Third Reading in record time. A contribution was also made by the Minister. I am sure that all hon. Members will say, "Hear, hear," to that. Throughout the passage of the Bill, he has been exemplary. The spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) has also been constructive, as have hon. Members from minority parties, mainly through their absence from the relevant debates. The Bill is a valuable measure, and I commend it to the House.

10.28 am

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on an outstandingly competent and knowledgeable speech in moving the Third Reading of the Bill. I join in his comments about the receptive attitude of the Minister throughout the proceedings. It is refreshing to find a Minister who is willing to listen to common sense. The Minister distinguished himself in demonstrating that characteristic. We all regret the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) who originally promoted the Bill. When he sees the competent

[Mr. Douglas French]

way in which it has been piloted through the House, he will feel easy about staying away again, although, naturally, we hope that circumstances will not make that necessary.

I welcome the Bill, which was greatly improved in Committee. Short though the proceedings were, they covered important ground, and the Bill has come back to the Floor of the House better as a result, deservedly commanding the support of virtually all the professional bodies and independent practitioners who will be affected by it. Among legislators and practitioners, the Bill has wide support, which, assuming that it continues its path through to law, means that it will be well accepted and will greatly enhance the standing of the property world, particularly property sales.

Although, early in the proceedings, a few people expressed scepticism about the need for the Bill, the reasons are straightforward. First, would-be purchasers of property, particularly residential property, are caused inconvenience and cost by following the information given them by estate agents and other property sellers and, sometimes, travelling up and down the country to view properties in the belief that they have particular characteristics, only to discover on arrival or at a later date that the properties were not as described. Such inconvenience to the public should not be permitted; that is the prime reason why the Bill is necessary.

Mr. Ground: If that is the prime motivation for the Bill, why does the Bill not provide compensation for people who, as a result of misdescriptions, incur expenses and suffer inconvenience going to view properties, as my hon. Friend described? All they have from the Bill is the doubtful advantage of possibly bringing a criminal prosecution. That does not compensate a person who has suffered.

Mr. French: The Bill does not provide compensation directly, but the person who has suffered is not in any way prevented from bringing a civil action if he thinks that the breach, and the damages that he has sustained, are sufficiently serious. The Bill's prime purpose is to stamp out the unacceptable conduct of an estate agent or property seller. If it is successful in that, the damages that may otherwise be sustained will be avoided. The purchaser can still resort to a civil remedy if he so chooses.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: My hon. Friend made an important point about those who have suffered as a result of a misdescribed property being able to take civil action. If a criminal sanction has been applied to the person who made that property description, the civil action is likely to be expedited, and therefore the costs involved reduced. In other words, the case will be seen to have been considered, so the position vis-a-vis a civil action will be strengthened.

Mr. French: I accept that point. The Bill's purpose is not in any way to undermine the general, well-established principle of caveat emptor. The purchaser must still be alert to what it is he is being offered and how it is being described. If the sanctions were taken further, there would be a risk of undermining that principle.

The second reason why the Bill is important relates to valuation. Obviously, inaccurate information affects valuation. Anybody who purchases a property seeks to do so at a price that not only makes sense to him, but is underpinned by the marketplace. Inaccurate information can undoubtedly lead to a higher valuation of a particular property than it deserves, and can therefore result in an ultimate loss to the purchaser either because he has paid too much or because he cannot recover the cost when he subsequently sells. That is an important dimension underlying the Bill.

Thirdly, the Bill is necessary because there is currently no penalty on estate agents who persistently and repeatedly misdescribe and rely on disclaimers to relieve themselves of any responsibility. As a result the practice has become much more widespread than it would otherwise have been. The introduction of some force of law should cause estate agents and other property sellers to exercise greater care than in the past. That will be in the interests of consumers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest said that the provisions of the Bill were extended in Committee to cover commercial property. The possibility was much debated on Second Reading and I do not propose to rehearse all the points that were made. In essence, it was argued that it would not be practical to have one set of rules for selling residential property and a different set for selling commercial property.

The example given on Second Reading—it is a good one because it is typical—was of a residential agent in a market town being asked occasionally to sell commercial property, such as a hotel or shop. It would be absurd if one set of rules applied to him when he prepared a description of a house and an entirely different set when he prepared a description of a commercial property.

As my hon. Friend said, it was felt that the provisions of the Bill were unnecessary for large commercial property, because purchasers of commercial property are more likely to employ professional advisers to make sure that they do not fall into any traps that might be caused by a misdescription. However, then there is the difficulty of deciding at what point to set the dividing line between large commercial properties which should remain outside the scope of the Bill and others which should come within the Bill's scope. In practice, such a dividing line would not be workable.

There is the question of mixed hereditaments. Which rules would apply to the sale of a shop or retail outlet on the ground floor with a flat upstairs? If the two parts of the building were sold separately, a seller might be able to get away with a wild misdescription of the shop, but not of the residential part. There are countless reasons why to exclude commercial property would not be practical. I am pleased that the wisdom of the Committee has prevailed and that commercial property now comes within the scope of the Bill. I hope that it will remain so for the rest of the proceedings. On Second Reading, the Under-Secretary summed it up neatly when he said:

> "If we accept the principle that descriptions of property should not be false or misleading, it is somewhat illogical to draw a distinction that depends on the purpose for which the property is being offered, whether it is domestic or commercial."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1991; Vol. 186, c. 1256.]

I welcome the decision to extend the provisions of the Bill to solicitors. I am pleased that the Law Society's view now falls into line with this proposal. It is essential that the Bill should apply to solicitors, and to anyone else in the business of selling property. A solicitor is governed by the rules of the Law Society, but if he were conducting a transaction wearing the hat not of a solicitor but of an

estate agent, he would fall between the two stools of the Law Society's code of conduct and the Bill. That is anomalous and would confuse the public. Solicitors, builders and other professional people who sell property should be on an equal footing with estate agents.

The editor of *Estate Agency News*, David Perkins, put a number of points to me, one of which relates to clause 1(5)(c). He suggested that the word "plans" should be included after the word "pictures", on the ground that builders often sell houses "off plan", so that they cannot be viewed by prospective purchasers. The clause would thus read:

"a statement may be made by pictures, plans,"

and so on. I understand the reason for Mr. Perkins's suggestion, but the point is covered by the remainder of the clause, which adds:

"or any other method of signifying meaning".

That is all-embracing. An estate agent, endeavouring to be clever, may not want to write down his descriptions or utter them, but can use gestures to convey meaning. I hesitate to suggest what the gestures might be, but even that is covered by the clause.

Clause 1(5)(b) deals with omissions—a subject which much exercised my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) on Second Reading. It is worth emphasising that under the Bill an agent is not obliged to give a comprehensive description of a property. My hon. Friend implied that, the moment an estate agent omitted any information, he fell foul of the Bill. That is not the case: the essence of the Bill is that he must not leave out any information that materially qualifies an item he has chosen to include.

A commonplace example is the description of a property as being in a "quiet, tree-lined avenue". If that property backs on to a large cement works that operates 24 hours a day, the estate agent is falling foul of the Bill by using the word "quiet". If the cement works is noisy, that contradicts his description. If he had limited his description to "in a tree-lined avenue", as long as that was an accurate description, it would not fall foul of the Bill.

A similar example is the description "in a peaceful, rural location". That is all right unless the property is next to a motor-racing track. The track may be in a rural location, but the noise that it creates will negate the description "peaceful". The estate agent must be careful, and not tell only part of the story. The adjectives that he uses must not be contradicted by any material fact about the property.

If an estate agent described a property as having a "fine Welsh slate roof" but failed to mention that half the slates were missing, he would fall foul of the Bill because he would be contradicting the word "fine". The adjective "fine" would apply to not only the quality of the slate but the roof, and it could not be a fine roof if half the slates were missing.

As cases came before the courts, a body of case law would quickly be built up, but there are likely to be some grey areas. For instance, a property may be described as being "near the M25", which implies that the property is conveniently located for travel around the M25. However, if it turned out that the M25 ran through the back garden of the property, and nothing else in the description suggested that the property was in a peaceful location—which would be negated by having the M25 running through it—it could legitimately be argued that the description was accurate. That may be regarded as an extreme and improbable, if not absurd, example, but the courts will have to wrestle with such detail. I anticipate that the way in which the provisions are applied by the courts will be quickly understood.

Another example is the property described as having "cliff views". In normal circumstances, that would imply that the cliffs and the sea could be seen from the windows of the property. However, if the property were standing on the edge of the cliffs at Dunwich—which is not far from an area well known to the Under-Secretary it would legitimately have a cliff view, but the prospective purchaser would find the reality rather different from the implication. We shall have to see how the provisions in that area take effect in the courts.

On Second Reading, I mentioned property dimensions. The success of the Bill greatly depends on a common code of practice being adopted on how features of properties shall be correctly measured. I am thinking of, say, the way in which large chimney breasts, bay windows or low eaves are measured features.

One cannot begin to dispute whether a description is accurate unless there is an accepted code of conduct for measuring it. I hope that all property practitioners—rather than the small number who currently do it—will, as a result of the Bill, base their descriptions on a code of practice such as the one produced by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. That gives careful guidance on how features should be measured. Then, those who are careless in their measurements or who deliberately try to mislead will not be able to say that they are measuring in one way if the accepted method is to measure in another way.

By that I mean that one could not present the full dimensions of a room going into the bay window if the bay formed only a small part of one of the walls. To measure in that way would create the impression that the room was much larger than it was. I strongly recommend that the code produced by the RICS would be reasonable. But if it is not to be that code, we need an alternative to it, so long as a code is used.

The issue of the dimensions of land, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest, is more straightforward because, while it may not always be easy to arrive at a figure, a mathematical calculation is required to work out the area of land and there is an accepted way of doing that. Whether it is expressed in acres or hectares, there can be no dispute if the arithmetic is done correctly.

But one must guard against the use of expressions such as "set in half an acre" if it is not. Once the Bill is law, half an acre will mean half an acre. If the agent cannot be sure of his dimensions, he can resort to an expression which many estate agents now use—"standing in its own grounds"—as if there was anywhere else that a property could stand. That expression would get the estate agent off the hook of specifying a precise dimension.

The Bill will not make life easier for estate agents. Some may think that that will be no bad thing because, it may be thought, their lives have been rather too easy—if not now, at least a few years ago. The Bill seeks simply to give effect to the reasonable request that statements should be correct. If statements can be verified, then under the Bill the agent must verify them, unless he can show that it was reasonable for him to rely on information he was given.

Some statements that agents make are eminently verifiable if they take the trouble to verify them. To say that a property is freehold or leasehold is, in 99 cases out

[Mr. French]

of 100, easy to verify. If the agent expresses a view—which might be left to the acting solicitor—on the renewability of the lease, he must either make it clear that it is simply his view or, if he states that the lease is renewable, he must be sure that he is correct.

The same applies to the question of change of use. An agent may express a professional opinion about whether a property is likely to be eligible for change of use, but he must not state emphatically that it is eligible or that change of use will be granted, unless he is basing his statement on fact rather than on opinion.

Another example, also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest, is the age of a property. An agent will not, under the Bill, be able to claim that it is a 15th-century cottage, unless, first, he is sure of his facts and, secondly, if only the chimney breast is 15th century and the rest is newly built around the chimney breast. He could, however, express the view that the cottage is "believed to date from the 15th century", because that is not a questionable statement of fact, so long as he or some other people connected with the property reasonably hold the view that the property is believed to date from the 15th century.

Although tucked away in the Bill, a provision that will have an important effect is that which states that the Bill relates to oral representations; the provisions are not limited to written estate agents' particulars but also embrace what the estate agent may say to the prospective purchaser during the course, for example, of viewing the property.

That is likely to prove a more difficult aspect of the Bill. With written particulars, documentary evidence can be produced. With an oral statement, one almost certainly will not have a written record. On the whole, the spoken word tends to be less well considered by those who speak it, particularly if they are estate agents anxious to secure a sale. The spoken word is less likely to be accurately remembered and it is less easily proved.

That is particularly relevant when comparisons are made between properties, and, as is well known, agents will seek to secure a sale by making comparisons. A classic device is to make a comparison between a property being offered to a prospective purchaser and a similar property over or down the road. The agent makes comparisons and gives information about what he believes that other property has fetched, or is about to fetch, on the market. That assists the prospective purchaser in reaching a decision about whether the valuation being placed on a property for his purposes is likely to be realistic and sensible.

I understand that, as a result of the Bill, agents will have to be careful about statements of fact relating to other properties as well as to the property in question. In its present form, the Bill should catch the agent who states that the virtually identical house next door has just been sold for £100,000 as evidence in support of the price that he is asking for the house that he is trying to sell. Assuming that my interpretation is correct and the Bill also covers that, the consumer will be greatly assisted.

Mr. Ground: Suppose the agent makes such an oral statement based on a statement made to him by another agent, which is the way estate agents learn of such matters. Would the agent be protected by the due diligence defence in the Bill? If not, it would be a matter of concern if an agent relying on what another agent told him were guilty of a criminal offence.

Mr. French: My hon. and learned Friend makes an interesting point. I do not see why the information provided by another agent should necessarily be relied on to a greater extent than information provided by anyone else.

Mr. Ground: That is so, if the other agent was involved in a sale. My hon. Friend implies, perfectly understandably, that the other agent has an opportunity to have direct knowledge of the price at which the sale was concluded. That is covered by the provision that the second agent —that is, the agent now engaged in the sale—could show that it was reasonable in all circumstances to have relied on the information that he was given.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Are you aware whether a Health Minister will come to the House today to make a statement on the alarming developments in Watford general hospital? According to reports in today's newspapers—which have been confirmed by my office—because of the new internal market, Watford general hospital is looking to its balance sheet instead of to the interests of its patients. It has entered into a queue-jumping arrangement whereby patients in GP practices will jump the queue while the remaining 90 per cent. will be left further down the waiting list.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Lady is making a speech after raising a point of order. Mr. Speaker has not been informed that a Minister plans to make a statement today.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that the House will not sit on Monday and that there is chaos and crisis throughout the health service as market forces take over. If a Minister came to you now, or some time this morning, to seek to make a statement at some time today, would it be possible to interrupt our business so that this serious matter could at least be raised before the short weekend break that we are about to have?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and the House knows, when the Government seek to make a statement, Mr. Speaker is informed and the Minister then makes a statement either at 11 o'clock or, occasionally, much later just before the end of our proceedings. At the moment, no information has been given to Mr. Speaker that a statement is to be made.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should like to help you. The problem that we face on this side of the House is that, as you know, there has been one calamity after another in the health service this week. Despite several requests for statements, we have only had one. If it could be brought to the notice of the Leader of the House that we urgently need a comprehensive statement on what is happening, that would help to clear up these endless points of order that are being raised every day of the week.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Does it relate to the previous point of order?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it possible, in view of the record length of waiting lists and the current developments, to have a statement later today? If so, the Labour party is willing to make time for it in terms of the important Bills before us.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it related to the previous point of order?

Mr. Powell: No, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is a different point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: If it is a different point of order, I shall deal with the two points of order that have been made.

The hon. Gentlemen will know that Ministers are in place on the Treasury Bench and I am sure that the matter raised will be noted in the appropriate place. I shall now deal with the hon. Member's point of order, which is different.

Mr. Powell: My point of order is related, in so far as it has many consequences for the whole country. I am surprised to hear you say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that no Minister has told Mr. Speaker or yourself, as the Chairperson of today's proceedings, that there will be a statement about the outcome of yesterday's local election. Surely we should now be told the date of the general election.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The occupant of the Chair would also like to know the date of the general election, but it is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. John Marshall: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier this week, an advertisement appeared in various newspaperrs describing a pupil in my constituency as being in a school for six hours a day in a freezing room where the walls were crumbling. That advertisement is inaccurate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is very articulate. Will he put the point of order so that I can deal with it?

Hon Members: He has lost his voice.

Mr. Marshall: Those who talk about the health service should show compassion for someone who has lost his voice.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is turning into a debate, and I am not about to allow that.

Mr. French: May I pick up the point that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) made before the interruptions? If the agent involved in the second sale obtained his information from an agent involved in the first sale, the agent involved in the second sale could rely on clause 2(2) if he could show that it was reasonable in all the circumstances that he should have relied on the information that he was given. If he obtains that information from an agent involved in an earlier sale, prima facie he could say that it was reasonable for him to rely on it. However, if the information given by the first agent turned out to be wrong or inaccurate, the first agent would then be caught by the provisions of the Bill. It is perfectly clear from clause 1(1) that the provision applies when

> "a false or misleading statement about a prescribed matter is made in the course of an estate agency business".

It does not say that that misleading statement must necessarily be made before a translation is concluded. The misleading statement could be made after a sale or during a second sale, so that the first agent would then become liable if he had passed inaccurate information deliberately or misleadingly to the second agent.

The Bill does not seek to undermine an agent's duty to a seller. After all, an agent's prime responsibility is to do his best for the seller by whom he is engaged. It is his task to present the property in the best light possible and the Bill does not seek to inhibit him from fulfilling that task. It simply sets reasonable standards by which that task must be fulfilled and the agent must exercise his judgment to give correct, accurate and true descriptions, which are not misleading.

However, the doctrine of caveat emptor still applies. The Bill does not interfere with that. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston said, the agent who commits an offence under the Bill is liable to a fine, but that does not provide the ground for action for damages by the imprudent purchaser. If, for example, the Greenwich tube line is destined to go under a property, or the channel tunnel is destined to go through the garden of a property, it is for the purchaser, with the help of his solicitor and the local authority search procedure, to discover those pertinent facts relating to the property's future. There is no obligation for the agent to know that that state of affairs prevails. If the agent knows, there may be an obligation on him to divulge that information, but there is no obligation on him to establish whether the property is liable to any such development. Equally, it is up to the purchaser, with the help of his surveyor, to discover whether the foundations of the property are shifting. The agent is under no obligation to discover such information, particularly if there are no grounds for suspecting that anything is wrong.

Equally, it is for the purchaser to discover whether the garden of a property floods every year, unless the agent describing the property refers to "a well-drained garden". The agent would then be making a statement without revealing another fact that substantially qualifies what he has said. Providing that the agent does not refer to a well-drained garden, he would not be caught under the Act and it remains for the purchaser, if he suspects that the land on which the property is located is liable to flooding, to establish whether that should affect the price that he pays for the property or his decision to buy it.

Some people have argued that the Bill is a bit of a killjoy, as it will finish off all those amusing estate agents' descriptions, exemplified traditionally, but rather untypically, by the late Roy Brooks. I doubt whether the Bill will have that effect, because the standard applied to the descriptions is what a reasonable man would understand by the words that are put before him. A false or misleading statement has to be about a prescribed matter, which under clause 1(5)(d) is any matter relating to land. Clearly, that leaves the estate agent with the freedom to refer to the nature of the seller of the property. That is how Roy Brooks made his reputation.

[Mr. French]

Some examples of Roy Brooks' advertisements are published in a little booklet called, "Mud Straw and Insults", which is a collection of his property advertisements. This one appeared in July 1970 under the heading

"Tory Party agent going into fruit and veg"—

after yesterday's results, there may be more examples of that—

"Less neurotic than Party members—even a wilting cabbage."

It goes on to talk about the "forced sacrifice" of a much-loved Fulham home.

Other estate agents have tried their hand at that, but never quite reached the standard of Roy Brooks. That sort of fun at the expense of the profession or character of the seller remains entirely in order. I have another example:

"Chartered accountant and surgeon's young liberal daughter off to a Phoenician isle sacrifice period corner cottage in fash Camden Town."

The only risk he would now take is that the cottage must be period and it must be a corner cottage. I will not go into whether Camden Town is "fash" these days.

A third example describes a flat in Richmond hill as the

"Strange habitat of a Roedean headgirl and parachutist".

I believe that I am right in saying that the only Member of Parliament who is a former head girl of Roedean is the Minister for Overseas Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasy (Mrs. Chalker). You are nodding, Madam Deputy Speaker—possibly to indicate that you also held that honourable position.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No. What the hon. Gentleman said was absolutely correct.

Mr. French: I am sure that it would have been entirely appropriate for you to have held that position, Madam Deputy Speaker; none the less, it was held by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey.

Descriptions included in the presentation of property details which do not relate to the land itself can be as wild as they wish, because they are not covered by the provisions of the Bill.

The Bill is not designed to make estate agents terrified to put words on paper or to open their mouths. It is designed essentially to catch those who misdescribe property in a reckless way. I suspect that, in practice, it will catch those who regularly do it recklessly and carelessly. Regular practitioners of wild and inaccurate statements will be caught under the Bill before very long. Of course, some will continue to sail close to the wind, and that is hardly surprising, but so long as the persistent offenders are caught, the interests of the consumer will be well served.

The Bill has been introduced in the interests of people making a major purchase such as a house, commercial property, office building or factory. If we compare the simplicity of the Bill with the enormous superstructure of primary and secondary legislation that has been built up around the Financial Services Act to govern the marketing of financial products, its merits become obvious. It has not been necessary to go into the enormous complexities which some people considered desirable in financial services legislation. We are achieving by the simple provisions of the Bill a similar result in respect of the marketing something of great value. I very much endorse the Bill and wish it a smooth passage through the House and the other place.

11.17 am

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am pleased to be able to support such an excellent Bill. It is timely and extremely relevant to my constituency and other rural areas.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) and join other hon. Members in saying how sad we are that he has been ill. He was right to work on the Bill in the aftermath of having been the Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs. We are all glad that he is recovering rapidly and I understand with pleasure and happiness that he is due to return to the House next week.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), who says that he is the foster father of this excellent legislation. I see from looking further down the Order Paper that he is also in loco parentis for the London City Ballet. Alas, I will have gone to Devon before he goes à pointe after what I hope will be a very light lunch that is correctly described on the menu, as are all the offerings from the many restaurants in the House of Commons.

I look forward to reading next Tuesday how my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest pirouettes and arabesques round the important matter of the London City Ballet. Will he please incorporate my support, implicitly or explicitly, when he is talking about the excellence of London City Ballet? I was fortunate enough a few years ago to see the ballet perform in front of the royal family in Denmark. Its members are outstanding masters of excellence for the United Kingdom in the field of artistic endeavour. I shall be sorry to miss what I know will be a fine performance and I am sad, too, that I will not be in the audience to hear my hon. Friend speak on the subject.

I also join my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest and others in congratulating the Consumers Association in particular—although other organisations have been mentioned—on its splendid continuing efforts. I have long supported and worked alongside the association, and this is another example of its work on behalf of the consumer. I saw Lady Wilcox, its chairman, last night and also last week and I am glad to support her work and that of her association and its director-general.

This Bill is about offering the consumer a fair deal and it is timely because of its introduction, in the best traditions, of fair dealing to descriptions of property, which are a cause of growing anxiety for consumers, who want accuracy of description of everything offered to them.

The Bill seeks to identify and strengthen among estate agents the fine marketing line between hyperbole and pessimism which was recently identified for me when I was seeking to move nearer my place of work, the House of Commons. I looked at a small property in south London, which the agent described to me as an elegant jewel of early Georgian architecture. Luckily I invested in a surveyor's report. The surveyor's blunt words to me were, "This house was gerry-built in the 18th century. I cannot think how it is still standing. If you buy it, be careful where you place a picture: the wall may fall down as the nail goes in." There was a delightful difference between hyperbole and pessimism—a difference well known in marketing terms to politicians here.

I know how strongly London Members must feel about the NALGO advertisement and I strongly support the view advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). I was even more concerned than he about the advertisement showing the baby said to have needed an incubator, but it could not have one because the hospital lacked one. Conservative Members will have seen in yesterday's papers the righteous indignation of the mother, who said that her baby had not needed an incubator and that she had been told that the photographic sessions were the prize for entering a photographic competition. She had not been told that her baby, the misleading statements about it and the hospital where it was born would be used wrongly to promote Labour party policies.

Fair dealing? I believe not. And the consumer, in the form of the electorate, will reward the Opposition in kind at the general election. Many votes were pocketed by the Opposition last night without fair dealing and under the influence of these massively inaccurate descriptions by NALGO.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Are not those advertisements just part and parcel of Labour's cynical scaremongering about the health service in general, whereby it deliberately strikes fear into the hearts and minds of people?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That has nothing whatever to do with fair dealing.

Miss Nicholson: What I am saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, relates to a misdescription of a hospital—but I bow to the Chair's ruling—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The intervention bore no relation to Third Reading, so I am asking the hon. Lady to return to Third Reading.

Miss Nicholson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I will do so.

Under the leadership of the Consumers Association the individual is seeking ever more accurate descriptions right across the board, not just from estate agents. That is part of a growing trend supported and encouraged by the Government—providing accurate information about everything for consumers. I hope that we shall convert the Opposition to accurate description of most matters, although a complete conversion will be difficult.

Welsh slate was mentioned earlier, but the hon. Member who mentioned it has left the Chamber so I shall not have the chance to convert him to the idea that Devon slate would have been better in any case. Those of us who keep a close eye on accurate descriptions welcome the growing trend, promoted by the Government, of making such descriptions as accurate as possible. Last year, for instance, there was a case of contaminated animal feedstuff which highlighted the need for accurate labelling so that farmers knew what they were buying from their suppliers. It also highlighted the fact that under European legislation it is perfectly possible for a farmer to believe that he is buying maize pellets when he is actually being sold maize replacer pellets—meaning things in the pellets that the farmer cannot identify. At the other end of the line is the consumer whom the farmer seeks to serve, and the farmer in turn needs to have an accurate description of the product and of the animal feedstuff that he buys.

I was interested to learn about orange juice labelling, which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food recently investigated. It appears that even unsweetened juices can contain 5 per cent. sugar. For all those reasons it is critical that consumers have accurate information.

The phrase "chocolate flavour" can mean that no chocolate need ever have gone near the piece of merchandise labelled as such. These matters are all relevant to this Bill because they show that the Government are seeking all the time to strengthen and improve the accuracy of consumers' knowledge. That is why the Government are so right to support this Bill.

I am astonished that estate agents' descriptions have thus far escaped the provisions of the law and do not come under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. We should all realise, however, that fair dealing does not form part of European legislation. I am especially aware of that because of the draft directive on computer software, on which a common position has been adopted which, on the face of it, is well in line with our Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988; but as that Act works within the idea of fair dealing, the directive may have implications for our legislation that we would not want. I have conducted a lengthy correspondence and had meetings with Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry on this subject.

It is critical, especially with property, that accuracy should be sought right down the line. The absolute minimum regulations which the Bill offers should be adopted without delay. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister said:

"Some people would advocate a more draconian and detailed regime".—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1991; Vol. 186, c. 1253.]

Opposition Members have suggested that. The Minister has guaranteed that if the Bill proves insufficient, he and his colleagues will be prepared to consider further legislation.

I hope that we shall not have to go too far. I hope that best practice and professional codes of practice will prevail, as they do in other professions. It will be a great pity if we have to go into such fine detail that estate agents feel inhibited from trying to sell property. We rest on their excellent services and it is crucial that they work as far as possible to their own best practice as a profession.

Let us not think that there is anything odd about misdescription in this decade. Yesterday, I attended the Torrington May fair, which has been held since at least the 12th century and probably even earlier. The clerk of Torrington town council announces at three different points in the town that there is a free fair and that there will be free victuals. He ends by telling all those who are coming to sell victuals to the populace that their goods must be of proper quality and must be what they have described. Even in the 12th century, there was the problem of the over-enthusiastic seller and the willing buyer who may be sold a pup.

The Bill is especially important to the aim of accurate description because where one lives is not only the largest individual purchase that one will make in one's life—as an individual or perhaps as part of a company—but a vast psychological investment. It is unquantifiable. Ownership of a property—or a lease or contract if one rents a property—as Conservative Members know well, is utterly critical to human psychological health. That is why council house sales, which have been promoted by the Conservative party, have been so hugely successful. It is

[Miss Nicholson]

our recognition that "me" and "mine" mean so much more than "us" and "ours" in terms of self-confidence alone that has made us go further in terms of property ownership than any other political party has done. It is to the credit of the Conservative party that this country now has the highest-ever property ownership and that we are moving on to consider the private rented property market for the same reasons.

The purchase of property is a huge psychological investment for an individual or for a family and it is the largest monetary investment that anyone will ever make. It is also an enormous investment in time. Purchasers who come to my constituency and to other parts of the south-west often have an idea of the life that they could lead in the country that may be unrealistic and which should not be fostered by over-enthusiastic national estate agents. I say at once that our local estate agents are fine examples of accuracy and excellence. Messrs. Gordon Vick, for example, was established several generations ago in Okehampton. If one looks in the window, one can see exactly what is on offer because properties are described accurately and carefully; the descriptions are not misleading.

Other national estate agents talk in their initial write ups of "panoramic views" of "water meadows". The water meadows may turn out to be the local sewage disposal works. Estate agents talk about "a rural setting", which may be very different from what the consumer expects. It is not always easy to match the consumer's expectations. I had an angry letter from someone who had just moved into a village in my constituency because the estate agent had described the property as "a rural idyll" with "exquisite green views". No sooner had the person moved in than the farmer, quite rightly, ploughed up the green field and planted rape. The letter was full of righteous indignation because the person now had a bright yellow view. I was asked what I, as the local Member of Parliament, would do about it. Everyone who lived in the village knew that the farmer would plough up the field. I do not know whether the Bill would enable me to attach any blame on the estate agent. I have described the case merely to show that the perception of people who come from the city about what they will acquire in the countryside is often far removed from reality.

In my constituency at present, strong points are made about access. We have the Okehamption bypass and, a little further north, the north Devon link road. It is important that when people buy a country place, whether large or small, and are told that they have easy access to national and international communications, they are not sent to see a house that is by the side of a motorway. Gardens full of rocks and stones in rural areas are sometimes described by national estate agents as "having a beautiful rockery".

One of our greatest problems at present is radon gas. Hon. Members may know that radon gas is now said to be a health hazard and that the Department of the Environment has invested considerable money in telling people which houses have radon gas beneath them. Our view is different from that held in the late 19th century, when radon gas in Bavaria was promoted to British Victorians as a health benefit. People were encouraged to go to Bavaria, to go down a mine that had natural emissions of radon gas and to breath it in to enhance health. In today's world, radon gas is seen as a health hazard. A number of houses in my consituency are built on Dartmoor rock, which creates radon gas. One house is said to have the worst radon gas problem in the United Kingdom. It is the doctor's surgery in Chagford. I do not wish to introduce any indelicacy into the debate, but I must say that it is especially ironic that the room in which the radon gas is most prolific is the patients' wash room.

I have a question for my hon. Friend the Minister. Under the Bill, will estate agents be required to indentify whether a house has radon gas beneath it? That is a marketing point that any good estate agent—good in terms of wanting to sell the property—would ignore. However, it is a consumer purchasing point which any buyer would badly want to know. That is a serious point, but it shows how critical it is to build accuracy into the estate agents' code of practice. I am sorry that it had to come to legislation, even modest legislation. I should have preferred estate agents to recognise and honour a code of professional standards.

I end on a lighthearted note. I referred to a house in Okehampton which has exceptionally high emissions of radon gas. A family lives there and members of three generations of that family have lived to 100.

I support the Bill and I thank the Minister for his keen acceptance of it.

11.40 am

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): I accept that it is desirable to improve the accuracy of estate agents' descriptions, but I have some unease about elements of the Bill. If its prime motivation is to prevent people from wasting time and money viewing properties in which they would have no interest, it is a pity that there is no provision enabling courts to make compensation payments in such cases. There are many examples in criminal law where similar compensation can be given. That would be a good way of ensuring that people who suffer are given redress.

I am concerned that the Bill makes it a criminal offence for an estate agent to make an inaccurate statement even though it may be a misprint, typing error or arithmetical miscalculation. The aim of the Bill should be to prevent people from suffering as a result of misdescription, not to punish every human error that may be made. If compensation is not available in the criminal courts, perhaps we should consider providing for a civil remedy.

Many references have been made to the similarities between trades descriptions for the sale of goods and the sale of land. However, there are major differences between the sale of goods and the sale of land. A fundamental difference, which is not generally appreciated, is that, in the sale of property, there is no implied term of the suitability of that land for any use. The purchaser must take precautions to protect himself by relying on his own observations and the advice of his surveyor and his lawyer.

In some cases, the agent selling the property is not aware of its defects—even if they are defects of which the owner of the property perhaps ought to be aware. Under the Bill as drafted, an innocent agent may be caught, even though it is not reasonable to expect him to be aware of the facts.

I refer to a case in which I appeared at the Bar. A farm, which had been taken over by the Ministry of Defence during the war, was subsequently derequisitioned,

advertised and let to an enthusiastic young farmer, who took it on an agricultural tenancy and soon started to plough up the land. In the first few days, he hit a number of metallic objects, but this did not deter him. After a week, a great many of them had been discovered and he reported the matter to the police. The farm was rapidly shut down. The Ministry of Defence reappeared and hundreds of unexploded bombs were found within ploughing depth or just below it.

Understandably, the farmer thought that he had legal redress and he sued the landlord and the Ministry of Defence. He had no remedy, however, because there was no implied term that the land was suitable for agriculture. It is a fundamental basis of the law on the sale and leasing of property that such terms are not included. Parliament should perhaps consider that at some stage, but as long as that is the law, there are dangers of saddling an agent with liability for statements about property when he has no knowledge of its defects. In the case of the farm with unexploded bombs, it is difficult to see how the agent could have described the farm without committing an offence —of omission, at least—which would have fallen four square within the scope of the Bill.

The Bill states that an estate agent will not be caught if he shows that it was reasonable in all the circumstances for him to have relied on the information, having regard to the steps that he took, and those which might reasonably have been taken, for the purposes of verifying the information and to whether he had any reason to disbelieve the information. That gives the estate agent a difficult area of inquiry. With hindsight, people might be able to imagine all sorts of things that the estate agent in the case of the farm ought to have done to satisfy himself that the land had been satisfactorily cleared by the Ministry of Defence after its use as a bombing range during the war.

That is an example—perhaps an extreme example—of the hidden unknown risks in respect of which estate agents could be rendered liable under the Bill.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. and learned Friend is referring to an interesting case. Can he tell the House whether, when the farm was put up for letting or sale, the estate agent knew that it had been a Ministry of Defence bombing range and whether he included that information in the particulars of sale?

Mr. Ground: I am afraid that it was a long time ago, and I would not wish to attempt to say exactly what particulars were given. I simply cannot remember. I am merely using the case to show that the Bill could create considerable problems for an agent letting land even if it had been given a certificate of clearance after its use as a bombing range.

Mr. French: In my hon. and learned Friend's example, what would he have expected the agent to include in his details that would have rendered the omission of the possibility of the bombs a material factor?

Mr. Ground: I simply do not know. That is a matter of speculation and I am not an estate agent, although I have done much work involving estate agents and surveyors. I fear that, if the agent in question had made any innocent representations about the quality of the land for farming without knowing of the existence of the unexploded bombs, he would have been caught by the Bill.

Under clause 1(5)(b), almost any statement made about the farming potential of the land would have been misleading. Clause 1(5)(b) states:

"a statement is misleading (although not false) if what a reasonable person may be expected to infer from it, or from any omission from it, is false."

Almost anything that the agent said would have been false according to that provision. Therefore, there are real dangers which must be considered. I shall not oppose the Bill, but I merely draw attention to issues that need consideration. There is a danger of saddling an agent with a responsibility that is not borne by the owner of the property who will receive the full price for the sale or the full rent from the letting of the property.

Mr. Alan Williams: The main purport of the Bill is the descriptions that are given and what the estate agent says when selling, but it also provides the defence of due diligence. Anyone has the right to expect that a person selling something of such value would do that which it is diligent for a seller or a retailer—which is what an estate agent is—to do and the agent has a perfectly good defence as long as he has done all that is usually expected.

Mr. Ground: I accept what the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) says. If the agent knew that the land had been used as a bombing range during the war and he was a local agent, it is difficult to know what steps he would have been required to take under clause 2(2). What steps would reasonably have been expected to be taken to verify the information and to assess whether he had any reason to disbelieve that information? My example shows that there is a danger of saddling those marketing a property with a responsibility that is not borne by the owner of the property.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I understand the principle behind what my hon. and learned Friend says, but in practice I do not think there will be a problem. Where there is a strict liability, the due diligence defence which relies on the idea of reasonableness—which will inevitably be considered from case to case—is the only way to deal with the problem. My hon. and learned Friend asked the rhetorical question, what steps should the agent have taken in the example that he gave? I should have thought that an agent marketing a property previously used by the Ministry of Defence as a bombing range might legitimately have inquired of the Ministry what certificate had been issued or what assurance could be given that the land was no longer active. Clearly, if the agent did not receive the reassurance that he required, he should mention that in his particulars; not to do so would possibly give a misleading impression as to the land's agricultural viability.

Mr. Ground: I note what my hon. Friend says, but in this particular case a certificate was issued.

Mr. Coombs: So the agent had taken all reasonable steps.

Mr. Ground: That is all very well, but what further steps should he have taken under clause 1(5)(a) and (b)? Did the agent have any reason to disbelieve his information? That might be a difficult judgment to make in retrospect when hundreds of unexploded bombs are found. With hindsight, someone might suggest that further steps should have been taken. What my hon. Friend said does not entirely dispel the agent's worries.

[Mr. Ground]

The example that I have given is extreme, but there are many properties with defects which are not understood or known by the agent or the owner. Further thought should be given to the scope of clause 1(5)(b), about what is misleading as the result of an omission, and also about the "due diligence" defence, so that people who are inherently innocent are not saddled with a criminal offence or that, at least, if they are they have an adequate defence against it.

The requirements referred to in clause 1 about what will be the prescribed matters should be carefully considered in the light of differing liabilities imposed on the owners and on those marketing a property and the possible unfairness and injustices that might arise if matters are prescribed too widely, thus giving the property owners and those marketing the property wholly different responsibilities. I should like such issues to be further considered during the passage of the Bill.

I am also concerned about oral statements, especially the danger of relying on such statements made by another estate agent. It is well known that estate agents rely heavily on oral statements which they obtain from other agents about a property transaction, about prices and about the conditions of sale. Much valuation work is carried out on the basis of such oral information. A number of years ago, the courts discovered that oral statements were an unsound basis on which to value a property when they were not supported by the documents relating to the sale.

Such oral evidence should strictly be, and commonly is, disregarded. The only admissible documents are those recording the sale transaction and, if necessary, they can be obtained by means of subpoena. Often, when material is subpoenaed, a different picture emerges of the transaction than that which emerged from the estate agent's oral recommendations and second-hand information. To put oral statements about value within the ambit of criminal prosecutions is to make a serious extension of the criminal law.

Considerable difficulties could arise if it were necessary for an agent to rely on the defence that he had received oral information from another agent who was involved in the transaction and that he therefore had reasonable cause to believe it. There would be considerable difficulty in establishing that such conversations took place in the case of a criminal allegation. Further consideration should be given to whether we must extend misdescription to oral statements and whether purchasers might not be better advised to have statements in writing about matters that seriously affect the values of the property.

Although there has been intense deliberation about these matters, the Bill spent only seven minutes in Standing Committee. Not all the points that I have raised today have been fully considered. Although I welcome the general purpose of the Bill, I am slightly uneasy about certain aspects of it, and I hope that those points will be considered in future.

12 noon

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I join other hon. Members in supporting this important and valuable Bill. Although I am no legal expert, I agree with many of the points made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) about the need for caution with regard to interpretation and judgment. I imagine that those factors will be considered in specific court cases, although it would be nice to think that this legislation would be so effective that there would be no —or at least very few—such court cases. I am sure that the Government will consider many of the points made by my hon. and learned Friend.

I heartily congratulate the Bill's sponsor and I add my sympathy and commiseration to the sentiments expressed earlier about his absence today. We send him good wishes for a continued recovery. I thank the replacement sponsor and the Bill's other sponsors.

There is often jocularity when we consider estate agents. There is also always a violent argument about who has the lower reputation—politicians or estate agents. People who are hon. Members and estate agents presumably suffer doubly.

Presumably we should feel sympathetic towards estate agents because of the property recession. A rather cruel joke was circulating in the greater London area recently: "Why don't estate agents look out of their windows in the morning? Answer: because they would have nothing to do in the afternoon if they did." That shows just how slow and dull the property market has become.

The honourable and far-sighted members of the estate agents profession have tried to improve their operating conditions both through codes of conduct and by following legislation. They have tried to make the profession better and more reasonable, to use the word that has cropped up so often in this debate. However, there are still marvellous music hall jokes about estate agents and their fabulous descriptions of property ranging from "tantalisingly beguiling" to any other adjective one can think of.

I particularly liked the one about the young married couple who were looking round a house in the west country. Suddenly something was thrown through a window startling them. When they asked the agent what had happened, he said, "There you are, its only a stone's throw from the school." He should have been rewarded for his initiative and chutzpah.

However, these are serious underlying issues and they do not always respond to humour. I cannot resist recounting the apparently totally true story of the house hunter who, in despair, said to the estate agent, "But all the properties you have shown us today are far too expensive. Don't you have anything in the more modest price range that I first proposed?" Again, with enormous initiative and presence of mind, the agent said, rather witheringly, "Yes, I've got one on my books which would fit in with your rather modest price level. All I have to do is make sure that I move the wire-haired terrier by 25 ft. to accommodate you." On reflection, that story is perhaps so obscure as not to merit the humorous description that I was trying to apply to it.

In July 1988 an engineer in Petersfield in Hampshire discovered by chance, after taking the trouble to measure the dimensions properly, that the room measurements in the estate agent's details were different from the real size of the rooms. The agent was adding on the outer walls. There must be many such examples. Earlier this year, the property correspondent of the *Evening Standard*, Mira Bar-Hillel, who incidentally has supported my plans and those of other hon. Members for legislation prohibiting

demolition before obtaining planning permission—something towards which the Government are moving closer—referred to misleading descriptions. Copies of that article of 6 February are available in the Library.

In another case, a gentleman was purchasing a new estate house in a quiet cul-de-sac which was one of the principal features. However, the developer had applied for planning permission for an extension to the development for which the cul-de-sac was to be the main access road. There are many such examples.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston wondered whether the Bill would be entirely technically successful. All distinguished barristers have a sense of doubt about such matters. It is difficult to legislate properly to cover all contingencies. My hon. and learned Friend also argued from the opposite side of the fence and said that we should provide a fair balance and give estate agents and property developers a chance to submit themselves to the legislation in respect of reasonable conditions and reasonable compensation arrangements.

No Bill can be perfect in that sense. It is perhaps a fault of our legislation that we sometimes have too much legislation, the drafting quality of which may be less than we expect. However, the Bill tidies up an area in which there are gaps. I hope that the Bill becomes an Act because I support it with great enthusiasm. I presume that the more dubious activities of the agents that do not have the full professional recognition of their trade association may be covered. Those agents often trawl an area, touting for business by knocking on doors of properties outside which there are many "for sale" signs.

Although it is not part of this Bill's remit, the public would welcome further tidying up of the procedure on "for sale" boards. The larger financial institutions that now control and own estate agents must be especially keen to have controls on the more dubious estate agents. Those agents are well-known for putting their feet in doors and scaring the vendor by telling him that the agent acting for him is no good and that the more dubious agents should be given the business instead. Those agents are prone to providing more exciting descriptions of property in order to get sales.

Estate agents sometimes fear that there are too many agents when there is not enough business to go round. Many have gone out of business recently and we sympathise with the enforced redundancies and hope that it is only a temporary phenomenon. However, in May 1988 *The Times* reported what was, in one sense, a delightful story. Two estate agents began fighting in the street over a property in Swindon. The slanging match turned into blows. One of the elements of the quarrel was the fact that one agent believed that the other did not have the necessary qualifications.

This Bill had a very short Committee stage, but it has widespread support. It is well constructed and balanced between all the competing considerations. Although I am not a lawyer, I do not share the anxieties expressed by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston. The Bill is excellent and I hope that it receives widespread support. I believe that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs will express the Government's support for the Bill and I support its Third Reading.

12.9 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): May I seek to reassure the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who has just made an interesting and amusing speech, that I followed the humorous anecdote that he described as "obscure". I have re-read the long title of the Bill, and there is no way in which the Kennel Club could be brought within it if the Bill were enacted.

I join other hon. Members in saying how sorry I am that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), who originally promoted the Bill, cannot be here on Third Reading. I understand that he is due back shortly and I welcome his return. It would have been pleasant for him to be here for Third Reading, even if he missed the preceding stages.

I do not shed too many tears for estate agents and valuers, because the Government have already provided a generous compensation scheme. The hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) spoke about the absence of a compensation scheme for purchasers, but the Government have just introduced an overwhelmingly generous compensation scheme for that sector of the market in their new proposals for replacing the poll tax—a scheme which will be an overwhelming bonanza for valuers. I understand that as much as £50,000 will be paid in fees to valuers to bring into force the proposals that the Secretary of State for the Environment has put before the House. I do not think that we need to worry about too many of them going bankrupt.

The Government are taking good care of estate agents and valuers, and we are trying to take care of the people who might be their victims. With due respect, I think that the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston is in danger of making slightly heavy weather of a straightforward proposition, which is that it is ludicrous that one has more protection when buying a tube of toothpaste than when buying a £100,000 house. Under the Trade Descriptions Acts, one has protection for one but not for the other. That is all that we are trying to remedy. We are trying to ensure that that sector of retailing is brought into line with others.

One must bear in mind the fact that we are dealing with an area of the market in which the inducement to mislead is considerable, although I am sure that most agents resist it. With a selling fee of 1·5 or 2 per cent. they stand to make up to £2,000 on a house worth £100,000. The inducement to be over-generous when describing a property is considerable. With that sort of profit margin for estate agents, it is all the more reason to protect the person who is making what we have all described as the biggest purchase of his life. It seems absurd that a small purchase should have protection but that it should be denied on the biggest purchase of a lifetime.

On Second Reading, that absurdity was demonstrated by the fact that if I were to get in touch with someone and get them to install central heating in my house I would get a description of what it would do, its quality and its capacity, and I would be protected. However, if central heating had already been installed in the house when I bought it, and the estate agent had given me faulty information about it, I could take no action against the estate agent who made a false description, although I would have been able to take action against the installer if I had had it installed. That cannot be right and clearly has to be remedied.

[Mr. Alan Williams]

I do not wish to speak at great length, because I want some time to be left for the debate on the next Bill on the Order Paper.

At an early stage in the presentation of the Bill, there was concern about whether solicitors as well as estate agents should be included when they were selling houses. That is important, and I am glad that it has been accepted. I know that the Law Society wanted to do something about the matter, but did not think that the Bill was the correct form and preferred to deal with the issue separately. However, advertising houses under the heading of a solicitor rather than an estate agent adds cachet and extra respectability and gives the public the feeling that they will have greater security when buying from someone who is a solicitor as well as selling houses.

That is why I was especially concerned about the example that I quoted in an intervention. Solicitors have to realise that they are getting into what the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston described as a slightly risky area for their reputations. That can work the other way, because if solicitors end up getting a bad name as estate agents, it could damage their business as solicitors.

In that intervention, I quoted the example of an advertisement for a house that appeared on Thursday 20 April in the *South Wales Evening Post*, which said:

"REDUCED FOR QUICK SALE: . . . well presented . . .. The property has been well maintained".

When I telephoned the firm of solicitors who are selling the property—David and Roy Thomas and Company—and asked whether the defects that had been identified in an earlier attempt to buy had been remedied, I was told that they had not been.

Since my intervention, I have been in touch with my informant, who told me that he had incurred the expense of going to solicitors, had lined up a building society, had gone through all the appropriate steps and was intending to buy the property. However, he found out that it required new windows and that there were major problems with the roof and the damp course among others. Therefore, he dropped out of the deal. Whether he incurred costs or not—I assume that he did—the people selling the property knew that the defects existed.

Weeks later, a firm—with the word "solicitors" in bold print on the top of the advertisement—is advertising the same property as well maintained. It may well be that they re-ran an old advertisement without bothering to modify it. Nevertheless, the public have a right to protection against that.

Many people—for example, first-time buyers—are at the margins of affordability when they buy a house. They scrape together every penny and go to the ceiling of what they can afford to purchase. If they waste money, by entering into negotiations via a solicitor and by employing a surveyor, only to have the deal fall through, it means that they will have incurred costs which will have to come out of the amount that they can afford for the next deal. That is why the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston was correct to say that there should be provision for compensation. When a description such as "well maintained" leads people to employ a solicitor and a surveyor, but they subsequently find that the property is not well maintained, it is wrong that they should lose money as a result.

The hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston was concerned for the innocent estate agent, but we are merely bringing estate agents into line with other retailers. If an hon. Member buys a defective product from a shop in the high street, under consumer law, his initial claim is made via the retailer and not the manufacturer. The main claim is against the person who sells the product. That is the direct and easy route. It is where the initial guarantee lies. All that we are saying in the Bill is that the person who is retailing the house should operate on the same basis as people retailing other products. The sad fact is that one cannot have a replacement if the product is faulty. As the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston said, one cannot have compensation, but he was wrong to feel that we are putting estate agents at a disadvantage compared with other people in the business of selling. Indeed, we are bringing them into line, but they are still on preferred terms, because they do not have to provide replacements, make good any loss or pay compensation for costs incurred as a result of their misdescriptions.

The hon. and learned Member quoted an example. If the estate agent selling the land on which the bombs were found had reason to suspect that the bombs were there, he had a duty at least to warn people of the use to which the land had previously been put. I suppose that the cautionary note to estate agents is that it is wise not to advertise property as bomb-free.

I give my full endorsement to this long overdue measure. It is modest in its objectives. It is clearly logical. It simply brings probably the sector of marketing which is most important to the individual into line with other sellers. It is right that that should happen. The public deserve that protection. They probably deserve the protections that apply to other products, but which this modest Bill does not provide.

12.21 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) on his good luck in the ballot and on his decision to choose this subject for his Bill. I join others who wished him a speedy return to the House. I am sure that his return will be speedier and happier once the Bill has received its Third Reading. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for the fact that I cannot remain to hear his speech. Unfortunately, I must be in my constituency shortly.

The profession of estate agency includes some highly professional individuals, but also some unscrupulous, sheer, unadulterated rogues. It is a tragedy that, of course, the worst examples give the profession a bad name. It is as a result of the activities of a minority within the profession that estate agents are as highly regarded as Members of Parliament, purveyors of package holidays and those who sell second-hand motor cars.

The estate agency profession must examine some of the phrases that are used in some of its activities. When we think of estate agents, we think first of those beastly advertising boards that they put up outside the houses they wish to sell and then the way in which they describe those houses. Historically there have been estate agents such as the late Roy Brooks, whose descriptions of houses were so out-of-this-world that they gave one a sense of fun and a smile on a Sunday when reading them in *The Sunday Times*—or *The Observer*, if any hon. Member on this side of the House reads it.

Mr. Dykes: I do.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) confesses his sin. We shall forgive him.

When we read that a house is "a challenge to a handyman," we know that it is about to fall down. Even *The House Magazine*, one of the most respectable of papers, in only the last issue had a house described as a two-and-a-half-bed house. I assume that that means that it has two and a half bedrooms, not two and a half beds. I find the concept of half a bedroom amusing. Is it big enough for one's head but not for one's feet, or the other way round? Further on, a house is described as a house or office which sleeps seven. Does that mean that it has seven desks at which seven employees can fall asleep? Or does it mean that it has two bedrooms where four and three people could sleep? It is a vague description. All too frequently we see such unfortunate descriptions.

The profession includes a number of rogues and individuals who seem more interested in doing a sale than in maximising the return for the client. I always remember when I was selling a flat in the London borough of Ealing some years ago. Someone phoned me and asked why I had not accepted his offer. I said that it was simply because the estate agent had not put it to me. The estate agent had had two offers for the same amount and he decided which one to accept on my behalf. It so happened that the one that he accepted was made by someone with whom he had a contractural relationship in respect of other properties. Needless to say, when I heard that he had accepted that offer I told him that I accepted the other offer and that he could have the fun of tearing up the first contract and writing out another. Perhaps that taught him the lesson that he should not tangle with politicians who are determined to get their way sometimes.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Especially the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Marshall: I certainly would not tangle with the hon. Gentleman, either.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I certainly would not.

Mr. Marshall: But I would be happy to tangle with you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

A problem with the estate agency profession which is not directly determined by the Bill is that there has been a growth in financial conglomerates. Estate agents are owned by building societies—I almost said owned by the Prudential, but we all know what happened in that saga—and merchant banks. Those estate agents are interested in selling not only properties but the insurance policies of the merchant bank. They want to do more than simply sell a home. What they seek to do may not always be in the interests of clients because they seek a second bonus. Someone may be persuaded to take that second bonus when it may not be in his or her financial interests.

This has been a good-humoured and responsible debate. Everyone who has taken part has recognised the sincerity of the promoter and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), who has borne the responsibilities of a promoter without having his name on the Bill. The House owes him a deep debt of gratitude for his role. I also thank those who volunteered to serve on the Committee, even though it lasted only seven minutes. They spent longer going to the Committee than considering the Bill.

This has been a positive debate and I look forward to reading tomorrow that the Bill received an unopposed Third Reading because that is what it deserves.

12.27 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) and for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on introducing the Bill. It is important because the purchase or sale of a house is such a major event in the lives of our constituents and people throughout Britain. It is right that the law should enforce the same standards of honour and honesty in advertising by estate agents as apply to any other advertising. *[Interruption.]* I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) will excuse me, but I find his conversation rather loud and distracting.

There will be some difficulties in the application of the legislation because there is so much habitual use of extravagant adjectives in house advertisements. I have just borrowed from the Library this week's edition of *Country Life* and turned to the long section at the beginning which has advertisements for houses. I see, for example, the following words: "delightful" house, "sympathetically restored". It may be delightful to some people, but not to others and it may be sympathetic to some, but not to others. The next one states, "An elegant, compact . . . house". It is certainly compact—it looks small from the picture—but it does not look elegant to me. Is that a misdescription? What would a court of law say if the description were challenged? The next one describes the house as "charming", but it does not look very charming to me. Then there is an advertisement that says, "in glorious rural setting", but from the picture the rural setting looks rather ugly. The next one states:

"A beautifully presented period country house."

It does not look beautifully presented to me. It looks as if it has rather a lot of modern concrete around it. The next one states:

"A pretty farmhouse with splendid outbuildings in an idyllic rural setting."

The outbuildings do not look splendid. On the facing page there is an advertisement stating:

"A most attractive Georgian farmhouse just outside a popular village."

I do not know whether the village is popular or whether that could be argued in court if it were challenged. The farmhouse does, however, look most attractive. So the advertisements go on. There is copious use of such extravagant adjectives and one wonders how far they would give rise to difficulties in court if cases were brought for misleading advertisements. Nevertheless, in principle, it is right that estate agents must conform to the same honesty in advertising as any other advertiser.

I hope that the House will not mind if I show the need for the Bill with reference to an incident involving my house and the one next door. I live in my constituency close by Hampton Court in the house where Christopher Wren lived until his death in 1723. The neighbouring house, now called the Paper house, was formerly the residence of the head gardener of Hampton Court palace, but was joined to my house from 1820 to 1958, when they were split apart again and new leases began separately for each.

In the autumn of 1988, my long-standing neighbour sold Paper house correctly, honourably and properly.

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

Within two months, the new owner bumped up the price massively and put the house back on the market with a different estate agent who used false descriptions. I leave aside a few minor inaccuracies, such as the false statement that there was a right of private access to the River Thames. The advertisement said that Sir Christopher Wren lived in Paper house, which he never did, and that English Heritage had agreed to put up a blue plaque saying that he had lived there. English Heritage did not and never would do such a thing because it researches these matters carefully. The advertisement went on to say that King Charles II had a clandestine meeting with Nell Gwyn at Paper house, when there is not the slightest evidence that either he or she ever entered it. Indeed, anyone with the slightest knowledge of history would know that that claim was bunkum because not only was the affair completely overt, but as reigning monarch he would certainly not have stooped to visiting his gardener's house to carry out the affair. It was a wholly false description.

The house remains unsold two years later because the estate agent who advertised it so dishonestly was exposed in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* and the speculator, who got the estate agent to advertise so dishonestly, has burnt his fingers. The only misfortune is that the house remains unoccupied, which is not good for a listed building.

I hope and believe that the enactment of this useful Bill will stop this kind of dishonest activity by certain estate agents. It will compel them, by the sanction of law, to meet more closely the higher standards of the better estate agents so that this trade will, as a whole, become a credit to our country. I wish the Bill every success.

12.34 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): The House is pleased to hear that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) has recovered from his illness and will be back next week to resume his usual place. I thank him for sponsoring the Bill, and for playing an important part in ensuring that it has been considered by the House and that the public will be protected.

I also pay tribute to the Consumers Association and the professional bodies involved and, unusually, to the Minister and the Government, who have uncharacteristically facilitated the measure—for reasons that I shall not go into, but on which people may care to speculate. There are also some unsung heroes: Mr. Bryan Davies, who steered the Estate Agents Act 1979 through the House, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who, as the then Minister, did much to promote it and since demitting office has done much to ensure that the public are protected in this matter.

Sadly, because of the change of Government in 1979, some of the key measures to protect consumers, in the Estate Agents Act have never been applied. We have heard some useful contributions today, especially from the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), who has done much work on the Bill in the absence of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West. The contribution of the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) was much appreciated, as were those of the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground), the hon. Members for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West, especially to her eulogy on her local estate agents. I should be interested to hear from people who are buying and selling houses in Devon, or from anyone else, about any complaints against the agents acting for them, as we are monitoring the matter closely.

The fundamental question is: why do we need the Bill at all? More than a year ago, the Director General of Fair Trading reported to the Government two simple solutions that would not require a new Bill. He spelt out that all the Government had to do was to make the misdescription of property an undesirable practice under the Estate Agents Act and to extend the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to cover property.

The sad truth is that for 12 years, the Government have done nothing to implement the sections of the Estate Agents Act that would ensure that all estate agents carried insurance cover for their clients' money and would be legally bound to carry bonding or insurance indemnity to compensate clients who had lodged money with them. The Government's failure to implement sections 16 and 17 has left the clients of certain estate agents with no proper protection.

For 12 years, the Government have refused to implement section 19 of the Act, which would give pre-contract deposits further protection. The 1979 Act provided that estate agents—who are responsible for the biggest and most important transaction in people's lives—should be fit and proper people in whom the public can place their trust.

Section 22 of that Act—again, not implemented—allows for minimum levels of competency. Without the protection of that section, the public have remained prey to the inexperienced, unqualified and unprofessional people who call themselves estate agents. Naturally, the three professional associations of estate agents set high professional standards, but without the implementation of section 22, there is no guarantee that those who call themselves estate agents are competent practitioners.

The failure over 12 years to implement comprehensive consumer protection measures has left the public almost defenceless to some of the outrageous practices that have been enumerated by hon. Members. For over a decade, Labour Members have been demanding that appropriate provisions of the Estate Agents Act be implemented, but for all that time the Government have refused. For over a decade, the victims of malpractice by estate agents have had their cases reported in the press, malpractices have been exposed by the Consumers Association and others and the Director General of Fair Trading has received a steady stream of complaints.

The director general takes action on breaches of the Act, but he says in his report:

"More frequently, however, the case reveals exploitation of loopholes in the Act."

He spells out the areas where the Government have not taken effective action and they are plain for all to see. Misleading advertising is the first, and the public have had to wait 12 years for this measure to tackle an abuse that the Government should have stamped out a decade ago. The second is unfair contract terms, binding the client to one agent and forcing the client to pay commission even if the

house is sold privately. The third abuse is the manipulation of prices, including the disgraceful practice of persuading vendors to accept the lowest offer when the agent also gets commission for arranging the purchaser's mortgage.

The action that we have been demanding is straightforward. Subordinate legislation under the 1979 Act, delayed for so long, must cover misleading terms, the disclosure of personal interests, the bidding up of prices on the basis of false information, tie-in arrangements and forced services, information about prospective liabilities and a comprehensive list of trigger offences.

The Minister owes us an explanation of why the Government have dragged their feet over introducing the subordinate measures, which have only recently been brought before the House. I hope that he will outline the compensation that the Government intend should be available to victims of the misdescription of property. He must spell out when he expects all the legislation giving proper consumer protection to be in place, and give an assurance that the obstruction and delays that the Government have inflicted on such measures will be abandoned in favour of a real commitment to the house buyer and house seller.

12.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I wish at the outset to add my congratulations to those of other hon. Members to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on the way in which he has steered the Bill through its various stages. Although the measure has not exactly had a rough passage, it has in many ways had an unusual one, having been taken over by my hon. Friend from its original promoter, even before Second Reading.

If that were not enough, the Bill also had changes made to its short and long titles and received a number of other amendments in Committee in what might have been record time, with the acquiescence of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), whom I congratulate on his contribution to the proceedings in Committee. In all of that, my hon. Friend has remained patient, considerate and competent and has steered the Bill along a true and unswerving course.

I join hon. Members in expressing concern about my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). We wish him a speedy recovery. I am sure that he will be fully back in harness before long.

In my two hon. Friends we have the father and, as has already been said today, the foster father of the Bill. Perhaps I could also claim a little credit as the midwife, because the Government have provided full drafting services throughout the Bill's passage. Contrary to what the Opposition spokesman implied on Second Reading, I have supported the Bill from the start and I was pleased that he changed his tune today. I have argued strongly in support of the Bill within and outside the Government in the short six months in which I have been Minister for Consumer Affairs. I shall not say whether I was present at its conception, but I am happy to reveal that I have provided a good deal of perinatal care. The result is a healthy Bill which will protect buyers of property without placing significant additional burdens on any of the parties involved. That is no mean achievement.

I should also like to thank those hon. Members who served, albeit for a short time, as members of the Standing Committee and who gave the Bill and the amendments to it such a smooth passage. I believe that the resulting Bill has benefited immensely from the Committee's work, and I should like to examine it in a little detail—particularly the changes that have been made since the Bill was last before the House.

I am grateful for the comprehensive survey that has been conducted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest early this morning. One of the satisfying aspects of Friday morning business is that we can debate important Bills in a steady, almost leisurely, fashion, and that is entirely right. This morning we have even had time to give timely advice to NALGO about the need to avoid misdescriptions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) said, all of us in public life, whether we are estate agents or not, have to tread a narrow path between hyperbole and pessimism. NALGO is guilty of both. I could not accuse estate agents of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. This may be a leisurely debate, but it still has to be in order. NALGO has little to do with property misdescription.

Mr. Leigh: I accept your ruling, Mr. Speaker, but NALGO has been referred to so many times this morning that I thought that a fleeting reference——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not when I was in the Chair.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) for their examples of lyrical descriptions that have been given by estate agents. It may be significant that all three of my hon. Friends are from the former county of Middlesex. Is there something in the air of Middlesex that makes estate agents wax lyrical? I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham for his description of his neighbour's house. I know that his house is very fine and I am sure that his accurate description of his neighbour's house will ensure that it soon finds a buyer.

I said on Second Reading that I had considerable sympathy with the desire expressed by most hon. Members present that the coverage of the Bill should be extended. I welcome back to our debate the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who made some pertinent remarks on Second Reading. I hope that he is satisfied with our achievements since Second Reading. Incidentally, although we have had a long debate this morning, the right hon. Gentleman, in his short and timely speech, summed it up in one sentence when he asked why we should be more protected when we buy a tube of toothpaste than when we buy a house. When we buy a tube of toothpaste we are protected by the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

The Bill strikes the right balance following the rather limited scope of the original version—I accept the strictures of the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Swansea, West on Second Reading. That limited Bill applied only to estate agents selling residential property and there seemed to be a suggestion by some that it should cover absolutely everyone who might ever be involved in property sales. The Bill now extends to the sale of commercial property as well as residential property. It

[Mr. Leigh]

applies to builders and developers, as well as to estate agents. It also applies to solicitors when they are acting as estate agents. Perhaps I could look at each of these in turn.

As I said on Second Reading, if we accept the principle that descriptions of property should not be false or misleading, it is somewhat illogical to draw a distinction that depends on the purpose for which the property is being offered; in other words, whether it is for domestic or commercial use. I am, of course, aware of the point that has been made by commercial property agents: that it is traditional for the purchaser not to rely very much on the description of the property supplied by the vendor. I must admit that that surprised me, but perhaps I am a mere innocent in these matters. I also understand that it is customary for the potential purchaser to have the property inspected before committing himself to buying it.

I do not accept, however, that for those reasons commercial property should be excluded from the Bill. It is not the case that all purchasers of commercial property are sophisticated in the ways of the system. If the purchaser of commercial property is someone starting up in business for the first time, there is no reason to suppose that he should be any more sophisticated than an ordinary house buyer. Indeed, he may never have bought any property before and for him to buy premises that have been misdescribed will not get his business off to a very good start.

Furthermore, I consider that argument to be intrinsically flawed. It seems to me that it is tantamount to admitting that misdescription of property is common in the commericial field; that it is accepted; and that it is up to the purchaser to take precautions against it. I do not believe that that is a tenable argument, even if it may be true in certain circumstances. I have no wish to make life difficult for those selling commercial property, but, as the Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs, I do not see why they should be exempt from telling the truth or from taking reasonable steps to ensure that the truth is told. The Bill does not preclude disclaimers or qualifying statements and it contains a due diligence defence which is in fairly standard form.

I do not believe that it will be too difficult or expensive for a commercial property agent to comply with the Bill. If it means that the description of the property has to be curtailed somewhat or that caveats are included, so be it. If it is customary for the potential buyer to carry out his own inspection anyway, I cannot see that such changes will make a great deal of difference. Of course, it is also customary for the purchaser of residential property to arrange for a survey before committing himself to the purchase; nevertheless, the purchaser can still suffer detriment.

Nor will commercial property sellers be at any disadvantage compared with others in the market. The Bill now provides equal treatment for the main players and I really do not believe that those involved in the sale of commercial property have anything to fear from it.

It was clear from what was said on Second Reading that there was considerable sympathy with the idea that builders of new houses should be included in the scope of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest acted entirely honourably as the promoter of the Bill and as a property developer in saying that they should be included in the scope of the Bill. The House will have noted that and will be grateful to my hon. Friend.

I said that I thought that the arguments were persuasive, so I am pleased that we have found a way of amending the Bill to include not only builders of new houses, but builders of commercial property and builders who sell property that has been renovated and sales of developed land by property developers.

I am sure that that is right. To some degree, builders and property developers are in competition with estate agents and it seems only fair that they sould be subject to the same rules when describing the property that they are selling. Furthermore, from the consumer's point of view, it would be confusing and unsatisfactory if there were to be protection from misdescription when buying through an estate agent, but not when buying direct from a builder. That would be equivalent to the car manufacturer being allowed to misdescribe his goods with impunity, while the used car dealer was caught by the Trade Descriptions Act.

The third main change to the coverage of the Bill that was made in Committee was its extension to solicitors. I recall that on Second Reading there was considerable support for that, but I said that I remained open minded about it. Meanwhile, my Department and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest have been consulting the Law Societies on that point. It seems that they have no objections in principle to the Bill applying to solicitors when they are doing estate agency work. They have, however, expressed some misgivings about whether the Bill would leave solicitors vulnerable to prosecution if they were inadvertently to misdescribe property when carrying out their legal work, as opposed to their property-selling work. But following the amendments made in Committee, there is now an exclusion from the main offence for misdescriptions made in the course of providing conveyancing services, which are defined in wide terms in the Bill. I am therefore confident that solicitors—and, indeed, authorised conveyancers—have nothing to worry about on that score.

We therefore now have a Bill which is considerably wider in its scope than the one to which the House gave a Second Reading on 1 March. A significant sector of the property market that would not otherwise have been covered has been brought within its control, but there will still be a few transactions that will not be caught and perhaps I should say something about them, in case any hon. Members are concerned that something may be slipping through the net.

The Bill now covers commercial property sales as well as residential property. It covers builders and developers, as well as estate agents, and solicitors when they are acting as estate agents. The Bill does not apply to private vendors, however, and I do not believe that it should. Some may argue that this leaves scope for a dishonest vendor to collude with an unscrupulous estate agent so as to get a better price for the property by misrepresenting it. Estate agents, however, may argue that they will be culpable for misdescriptions made by a private vendor, while the vendor cannot be brought to book.

I accept that those possibilities are feasible, although I do not believe that they represent a serious enough danger to warrant a departure from the well-established convention that consumer protection legislation of this sort does not apply to private individuals. Collusion between a vendor and an estate agent would cause a

criminal offence to be committed in any case and in the second instance the Bill provides a defence for the innocent estate agent. I therefore consider that these problems are more theoretical than practical and are unlikely to prove a real difficulty.

When we were discussing the scope of the Bill on Second Reading, there was sympathy for the idea that it should extend to everyone engaged in the business of marketing property. Banks and building societies were specifically mentioned. On the face of it, that seems a logical suggestion, but I believe that direct marketing of property by banks and building societies rarely happens in practice. I am convinced that the great majority of these sales go through estate agents and will therefore be caught anyway. That does not warrant trying to stretch and strain this Bill—as a former promoter of private Members' Bills, I am aware of the dangers of stretching them—to cover what is almost certainly a theoretical section of the market. As it is, the Bill is relatively short and simple—even after my hon. Friend's efforts and his success in extending it—and it covers almost the whole market. To try to make it go further would result in a significantly more complex piece of legislation with little additional benefit for anyone.

I shall deal now with offences and penalties and perhaps refer to some of the other aspects of the Bill that have given rise to comment, on Second Reading and since, or may still be the subjects of query or debate. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) asked why there was no compensation provision in the Bill. That is not usual, as he knows as a barrister in the criminal law, but compensation may be claimed under powers of the criminal courts legislation, or by means of civil action or misrepresentation.

Offences and penalties are always a potential source of controversy in criminal law Bills. The fact that there has not been noticeable controversy in this case is a hopeful sign that we have got it about right. I believe that we have. I think that the provisions that the Bill makes for the nature of the offences, by whom they are committed, and the maximum penalties on conviction are reasonable and appropriate.

The possible alternative penalty of imprisonment is not to be available and I believe, on balance, that that is right. Because of the safeguards that are normally present in the property purchase system, someone will not often go through with the purchase of a property that has been seriously misdescribed—whether it be residential or commercial property—without the misdescription being detected. But that is not the only mischief at which the Bill is aimed. Potential purchasers of property can be seriously inconvenienced. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West made the point that large sums of money can be involved and that people can find themselves on the margins of their financial viability. People can incur serious financial loss even though they stop short of buying misdescribed property. But even in the worst case, when a purchaser buys a property that has been misdescribed because the fact has not come to light until afterwards, the maximum penalty of an unlimited fine on indictment is appropriate and should provide a sufficient deterrent against misdescription.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), in a significant speech on Second Reading, showed concern about the possible effect of the provision in the Bill that an omission from a statement could render it misleading. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) for his examples which so clearly exemplified a complex legal and practical problem. Both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest attempted to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow on that point and I hope that we have now succeeded.

It may be worth saying again that the Bill does not require anyone to make any specific statement. What it does require is that if a specific statement is made, it must not be misleading. I was grateful for the comments about tiles, sea views and about houses falling over cliffs and for many of the other examples with which my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester and for Torridge and Devon, West amused and enlightened the House. It seems common sense to me that the omission from a statement of something relevant can give the recipient the wrong impression and can thus be misleading. The Bill is not novel or unexpected in that respect.

The Bill would not mean that the vendor or the estate agent would have to reveal everything that they know about the property. A definite statement must be made in the first place before any omission from it can be misleading. If the person marketing the property is unsure about the accuracy or completeness of a description, he can always play safe and leave it out altogether, as several hon. Members have pointed out today.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the Minister for raising the point of order in the middle of his speech. It would have been preferable to be able to do it otherwise. I assure the Minister and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is not a deliberate attempt to disrupt his speech.

Yesterday, in exchanges in the Chamber, recorded in column 428 of the *Official Report*, between the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, references were made to the views of the British Medical Association, to the publications of the British Medical Association and to other matters. It is the case that what the Prime Minister said yesterday in the Chamber is not what is recorded in *Hansard*. The British Medical Association is extremely annoyed about the change in the facts and has approached us to have the matter raised here in the House of Commons. That is why I intervened in the Minister's speech.

Yesterday, in those exchanges, the Prime Minister, in referring to the position of the BMA, said—and I am quoting from what he actually said:

"And yet now say"—

that is, the BMA—

"and I quote from their own magazine, 'Suddenly targets don't seem so bad after all.'"

Hansard, in column 428, records the Prime Minister as saying, when talking of the BMA,

"and, only last year, it opposed the GP contracts, yet, in *GP Magazine*, it now says:

'Suddenly, targets don't seem so bad after all'."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 428.]

The first point is that, yet again, the Prime Minister was obviously badly briefed or confused—or both. *GP Magazine* is not a British Medical Association publication; it is a completely independent publication which has nothing at all to do with the BMA. The BMA's publications are called the *British Medical Journal*, as is pretty widely known except, apparently, by 10 Downing street, and the *BMA News Review*. The Prime Minister not

[Dr. John Cunningham]

only confused the publications, but totally misrepresented the views of the BMA. The BMA remains opposed in principle to contracts. It has repeatedly——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should get to the point of order for me.

Dr. Cunningham: I am coming to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is important and I accept that it is somewhat complicated. The Prime Minister misrepresented the views of the British Medical Association. I have checked the recording and there is no doubt as to what happened. The facts have been changed in *Hansard*. That is a point of order for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The record has been changed. Column 428 of *Hansard* does not report what the Prime Minister said. The record has been changed to cover up the Prime Minister's confusion and his misrepresentation of the views of the British Medical Association.

I put it to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is a serious matter and it is unacceptable that statements, particularly those by a Prime Minister, made in the Chamber should be doctored and the record changed in material fact. It is not a question of brushing up the syntax or changing the language: the facts have been changed.

I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to inquire into the matter and have the record put straight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The matter for me is that the hon. Gentleman alleges that what is attributed to the Prime Minister in column 428 of *Hansard* is different from what he actually said. I accept that it is a serious matter. I shall arrange for inquiries to be made and ensure that Mr. Speaker is informed of the hon. Gentleman's point of order. No doubt those on the Treasury Bench will inform the Prime Minister.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would not it be in order for us to know whether prior notice of the point of order was given to all parties concerned so that they or someone on their behalf could consider the question? It seems to me that the issue is being bounced along, probably to cover up the disgraceful behaviour of the Opposition in regard to their own advertisments on a similar subject.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has asked whether prior notice was given, presumably to the Prime Minister's office. I cannot answer that.

Dr. Cunningham: I can confirm that the office of the Leader of the Opposition has notified No. 10 Downing street of our intention to raise this matter as a point of order. The abusive allegations of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) do not arise.

Mr. Jessel: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is not the House entitled to know when the Prime Minister's office was informed? If it were informed——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That has nothing at all to do with me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There have been incidents of this kind before, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Since 1976, when radio broadcasting began, similar incidents have been considered by *Hansard* and by Mr. Speaker. The House is now televised so there are two separate methods of ensuring that what is said in the House is correctly transcribed in *Hansard*. I suggest that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pass this matter on to Mr. Speaker so that hearings can take place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Those involved in inquiring into the allegations will do exactly what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not question their competence to do so. Perhaps we should return to the debate on the Property Misdescriptions Bill.

Mr. Alan Williams: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have done exactly what you have to and you can do no more at this point. It is now a matter of checking with the *Official Report* and tape recordings. May we take it that on Tuesday, at the start of business, Mr. Speaker will make a statement informing the House of the exact outcome of the inquiries?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would not be wise for me to add to my ruling and it would be very unwise for us to start a debate on the matter. We should get back to the Property Misdescriptions Bill.

Mr. Jessel: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The fact that the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs was interrupted by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to make a point of order suggests that the debate in the House was being suddenly jumped and that the Government were not being put in a position to reply to the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made it clear that I am not prepared to accept a debate on the matter.

Dr. Cunningham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Conservatives appear to be gluttons for punishment. The issue would not have arisen in the first place if the Prime Minister and his office, knowing that they intended to change the record, had had the courtesy to write to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to tell him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If I allow the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to persist, I shall have to allow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) to do so. I do not think that we should try to debate the matter now.

Mr. Leigh: As you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was referring to omissions under the Bill which we have been discussing since 9.30 am.

The purpose of the Bill is not to force people to give comprehensive warts-and-all descriptions, as has been reported in the press, but simply to prohibit misdescriptions, either by commission or omission. I do not believe that estate agents or others in the business of marketing property need have any fears about the operation of this aspect of the Bill.

In case there are any remaining worries about the characteristics of property that may be prescribed in due course by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, let me assure the House again that we shall consult widely on the list before making any order. There is no likelihood, therefore, that the final order will materialise out of the

blue. It is worth making the point that the Bill will not have any practical effect until the order has been made, so there will not be any period of uncertainty during which people will be unsure about what the Bill covers and what it does not. I have said that the list of particulars suggested by the Director General of Fair Trading in his March 1990 report on estate agency is likely to be the starting point, but that list is by no means set in concrete. We will be consulting widely with interested organisations and they will have a chance to comment before any final decisions are made.

I have been a little surprised that some people appear to have reservations about the effect of the due diligence defence in clause 2. That issue was covered especially by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston. Perhaps I could remind the House what the clause says. First, it says that in proceedings against a person for an offence of making a false or misleading statement about property, it shall be a defence for him to show that he took all reasonable steps and exercised all due diligence to avoid committing the offence.

The clause goes on to make provision for a particular case and says that a person shall not be entitled to rely on this defence, by reason of his reliance on information given by another, unless he shows that it was reasonable in all the circumstances for him to have relied on that information, having regard in particular to the steps that he took and those that might reasonably have been taken for the purpose of verifying the information and also having regard to whether he had any reason to disbelieve the information.

That provision is similar to, or identical to, the defence provided for in other consumer protection legislation. It is identical in all material respects to the defence in the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and it is similar to the one in the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. Hon. Members may have noted that it is liberally seasoned with the words "reasonable" or "reasonably". In other words, no one is expected to do anything that is unreasonable in the circumstances. It would not be right for me to attempt to give specific examples of cases where I thought that the defence would or would not be successfully made out, but the courts are reasonable and they are used to considering what is reasonable in all the circumstances. Moreover, trading standards officers are also reasonable and they have long experience of dealing with the courts on the question of due diligence.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston queried whether an estate agent could rely on the due diligence defence when he relied on information given to him by another estate agent. It would be a question of fact whether the defence applied in those circumstances. It would have to be reasonable in all the circumstances for him to have relied on the information: regard would have to be taken of the steps that he took and might reasonably have taken to verify the information and whether he had any reason to disbelieve the information.

That type of defence is familiar territory in other types of business and I see no reason why it should cause practical difficulties in the property trade. I suspect that this, as with most of the previous points that I have mentioned, is simply an example of fear of the unknown. That is perhaps understandable in an industry which has not previously been subject to the sort of controls that have been commonplace in other sectors for many years. I am confident, however, that those fears are groundless.

The Opposition spokesman made several points about the orders and I shall deal with them. I refer to the other draft legislation that is relevant to estate agents and is currently before Parliament in case there is any confusion about that legislation vis-à-vis the Bill. Since Second Reading, I have laid two orders under the Estate Agents Act 1979. The Estate Agents (Specified Offences) (No. 2) Order 1991 will broaden the power of the Director General of Fair Trading to prohibit unfit persons from carrying out estate agency work. Prohibitions can be made only if certain circumstances have arisen.

At present, one of the circumstances in which the director general can take action is where a person has been convicted of an offence involving fraud, dishonesty or violence, or an offence under the Estate Agents Act 1979. The new draft order specifies a number of other offences under such statutes as the Financial Services Act 1986, the Consumer Credit Act 1974, the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986. If a person has been convicted of one of the specified offences and appears unfit to be an estate agent, the director general will be able to issue a prohibition order against that person. It is my intention that, if this Bill reaches the statute book—I have every confidence that it will—I will make a further order, adding the appropriate offences under the Bill to the list of specified offences for the purposes of the director general's powers.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Does not the Minister believe that he is closing the door after the horse has bolted? The property boom of the 1980s left many people vulnerable to the kind of malpractices that the Minister is now specifying. Why was not action taken then?

Mr. Leigh: I am responsible for consumer affairs and I have taken action under the various Estate Agents Acts. The hon. Gentleman knows that it takes time to obtain a legislative slot in Parliament for a wide variety of desirable consumer affairs measures. When we debate consumer affairs on Fridays or at Question Time, the hon. Gentleman always ask why we did not act before. He knows full well that these matters have been debated for many years. Some of the complex matters that we debate need to be revised under a general revision of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. I cannot simply snap my fingers and promise the hon. Gentleman a revision of that legislation in the next five minutes. It must take its place in the legislative queue. However, we will be legislating on those matters. No one can deny that since I have taken over my duties I have proceeded as quickly as I possibly can to introduce protection for the consumer with regard to estate agency.

I have also laid the Estate Agents (Undesirable Practices) (No. 2) Order, which includes a number of provisions that would also extend the circumstances in which the director general can ban a person from engaging in estate agency, or can warn a person to desist from a specified undesirable practice. The Government had originally intended to include among the undesirable practices that of misdescribing property. However, it would clearly not be appropriate to make an order on misdescription of property while this Bill is before the House. When the Bill is on the statute book, it is my intention to consider the matter again. The draft orders will be considered by one of the House's Standing Committees next week.

[Mr. Leigh]

Since Second Reading, I have also made the Estate Agents (Provision of Information) Regulations 1991. Those regulations require that information on the services being offered to prospective purchasers be given; that this information, as well as information about remuneration, be given at a time before the client becomes committed to the estate agent; and that the information be given in writing. The regulations also provide for the form in which certain terms used by estate agents in connection with their entitlement to remuneration are to be explained and for the prominence and legibility of those explanations.

As I have already said, the orders and the Bill will go a long way towards protecting consumers. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest on the comprehensive and skilful way in which he has steered the Bill through Parliament. It is a very good Bill and it has minimal implications for compliance costs. It will deal with the dubious end of the market and ultimately it will be one of the best things to happen to estate agency for many years. I am sure that we all want to commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

1.19 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I place on record my appreciation to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) because the Bill is based closely upon the Bill that he promoted last year. Indeed, it is just one year less one day since he moved the Third Reading of that Bill.

The speed with which this Bill has made progress is a fair reflection of its acceptance by the House. The merits of my hon. Friend's Bill last Session were well perceived.

As she darted in and out of the Chamber, I caught a fleeting glimpse of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), the Opposition spokesman on the Bill in Committee and on Report. I half hoped that she might be here, because she was extremely helpful last year during the proceedings on the previous Bill and I thought that it would be in order to congratulate her on the fact she had taken such a sensible stand on this Bill. It is important to pay tribute to the Opposition, except when they raise spurious and unreasonable points or order.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths Edinburgh, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) was here. Due to a misunderstanding between Whips and the usual channels, she was misinformed as to the time that the hon. Gentleman was likely to rise to his feet to speak, and she will be back as I know that she is keen to hear his comments and especially his praises for her co-operation.

Mr. Cash: It is always such a pleasure to see the hon. Lady, as she always adds to the graciousness of the House.

It is important to point out that the Bill offers a most useful and welcome improvement to the powers available to traffic authorities to impose temporary restrictions. It introduces a new code of powers to replace sections 14 to 16 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The changes will enable procedures to be streamlined, swifter action to be taken when required and unnecessary bureaucracy to be reduced in respect of matters that are of primary concern.

I am delighted to see that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford has now come into the Chamber. I am sure that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), who is sitting at her side, will pass on the remarks that I made a few moments ago.

Where temporary restrictions are required, for example during major works, the normal safeguards for pedestrian access are retained, as is the requirement to have regard to alternative routes. In addition, the provisions for traffic signs are strengthened and the powers of authorities to make suitable provision on alternative roads while works are in progress are enhanced.

Time limits for temporary restrictions are relaxed, but only by an additional three months in the case of orders affecting footpaths, bridleways, cycle tracks and byways open to all traffic.

As I am in an expansive mood, I shall also congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on the fact that, in conjunction with, and perhaps on behalf of, the Ramblers Association, he took such a close

interest in the original Bill, which ensured that we had complete co-operation from the Opposition last year. In these days of consensus, it is helpful to know that even last year, that degree of co-operation was possible.

Time limits for temporary restrictions are relaxed, and the provisions in question represent an accommodation which was reached in consultation with representative organisations, including the Ramblers Association, during the passage of the original Bill last Session.

Hon. Members have had many opportunities to debate wider highways and road traffic issues which have arisen from Government Bills. By contrast, my Bill works on a narrow set of powers and will make a series of improvements that are minor but none the less welcome. If they will do something to assist traffic authorities in the demanding task of controlling and managing traffic during building works or other highway works, and if they will minimise the delays which would otherwise be caused, they will be well worth while. In these days of extreme traffic congestion, anything that can be done to help to relieve the frustration of drivers and pedestrians is bound to be welcome.

It might be helpful to go through a few questions and answers, aimed not at you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but at helping to bring out some of the importance and value of the Bill. First, why is such an elaborate process required for dealing with temporary restrictions? The answer is that the law provides highway users with a right of free passage. Proper safeguards are needed to ensure that the limitations on that right cannot be unreasonably imposed, even where there is a legitimate reason. The Bill strikes an appropriate balance between greater freedom for highway authorities and sufficient protection for road users, including adequate notification and signing.

Secondly, why should not the role of the Secretary of State be removed entirely from the procedure? The answer is that the Bill will retain a minor role for the Secretary of State. He will have the power to prolong a temporary order while procedures for a replacement permanent order run their course. That mirrors an equivalent power in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 on experimental traffic orders. The Bill will remove the involvement of the Department in the merits of individual cases, leaving that for local authority decision, except where the Secretary of State is required to approve an extended period in respect of orders which affect footpaths, bridleways and so on.

Thirdly, how will the Bill improve the present position? It will provide uniform powers across England and Wales. That is most important. So far, we have operated on the basis of a patchwork or kaleidescope of powers. The Bill will allow authorities to act more promptly and comprehensively. It will also relax the current unduly restrictive time limits on notices and orders.

Fourthly, why should a distinction be made between notices and orders? The main procedural difference is that orders require local publicity in advance of the introduction of restrictions, whereas notices can introduce restrictions with immediate effect. The more summary notice procedure is therefore strictly time limited—five days for a works notice and 21 days for other notices. The Bill clarifies the need in both instances to have regard to the existence of alternative routes and will allow the prescribing of procedures to ensure adequate signing.

Fifthly, what will be prescribed in the procedure regulations? Probably not much that is different from what is set out in schedule 3 to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Provision will need to be made for appropriate local publicity, street notices and traffic signs. In the case of longer works orders, further procedural steps could be introduced, including a public inquiry procedure. The final detail will have to be determined in the light of public consultation on the draft regulations.

Sixthly, should there be incentives for speedy completion? Authorities are already under a general duty under section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of the highway and prevent as far as possible the stopping up and obstruction of the highway. Therefore, authorities are obliged to have regard to that when satisfying themselves on the need for a temporary restriction. Indeed, the New Roads and Street Works Bill going through Parliament will reinforce those duties and provide added incentives for the speedy completion of works by public utilities. It is possible that I have got that slightly wrong and that the Bill has already been enacted. Undoubtedly, my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to inform me. *[Interruption.]* He informs me that the Bill has not been enacted, so the important comment that I made remains valid.

Seventhly, the Bill confirms the need to have regard to the existence of suitable alternatives or diversionary routes before proceeding with the restriction. The procedures for temporary restrictions will be prescribed by regulations. It is most likely that they will impose requirements to indicate alternative routes, as schedule 3 to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 requires.

The eighth question is about the length of permitted closures. There was previously a three-month limit which applied only outside London and was regarded as an artificial constraint. The 18-month period proposed in the Bill is a sensible period, taking into account, first, consents previously given by the Secretary of State; secondly, similar provisions for experimental traffic orders under section 9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984; and thirdly, the general response to the consultation exercise in 1987. Exception is made for orders affecting non-motorised traffic on footpaths, bridleways, cycle tracks and byways open to all traffic, where the limit is six months with provision for the Secretary of State to approve extensions.

Ninthly, what scope is there for cost savings? It is difficult to quantify with any certainty what they will be. Clearly, the benefits will affect different authorities differently. Each year, about 15,000 orders are made by local authorities alone. The main advantage of the Bill will be to reduce bureaucracy by the removal of the consent provision and a more comprehensive set of orders.

Last year, the precursor Bill was considered in both Houses of Parliament. For some extraordinary reason, it ran into fairly stormy weather when we considered Lords amendments to it. Nobody who has heard the almost mind-blowing tedium of the bureaucratic arrangements proposed in the Bill could possibly think that it should be subject to a filibuster, yet that is apparently what happened.

This is a useful Bill and we are making sensible improvements to road traffic procedures. Of all the Bills in which I have ever had the pleasure to be involved, in terms of technicality, this one takes the biscuit. None the less, such matters must be dealt with. Many of our deliberations go unnoticed and are without glamour.

[Mr. Cash]

Today we are fortunate to have the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford to add a little sparkle to this occasion.

Clause 1 and the schedule to the Bill embody the Bill's substance by making new provisions for the temporary regulation of traffic by means of orders and notices. That is the main thrust of the exercise. In 1984 we passed the Road Traffic Regulation Act. As time has progressed, sections 14 and 15 have given rise to second thoughts. This Bill substitutes for section 14 a new section which is described as:

"Temporary prohibition or restriction on roads."

Subsection (1) re-enacts the substance of section 14(1) of the 1984 Act. It provides for a traffic authority to restrict or prohibit temporarily by order the use of a road in cases where the authority is satisfied of the necessity of doing so because of works or proposed works on or near the road, because of the likelihood of danger to the public or of serious damage to the road unconnected with such works, or to allow an authority to discharge its duties under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for litter clearing or street cleaning. That is extremely valuable.

Recently, the Minister for the Environment and Countryside visited the Stafford borough area because it had taken an initiative which, I think, we can fairly claim predated the Government's initiative for comprehensively cleaning up all litter. He obviously enjoyed himself, and we went around the town. We now have a task force in Stafford, which will reassure my constituents that litter will be blitzed. Such measures enable cleaning-up operations to be carried out more expeditiously. At least this aspect of the Bill has special relevance to my constituency, and I should like to believe that it will be advantageous not only to those in my area but to others throughout England and Wales. The Bill is not specific to my constituency; it has a general application and also has the advantage of removing the complicated patchwork of powers that has accumulated over the years.

New section 14(2) is similar to the 1984 Act by providing the power to

"restrict or prohibit temporarily the use of the road"

by a notice in cases requiring urgent action. Restrictions or prohibitions by means of a notice as opposed to an order —for those who can understand the difference between them—are severely limited in duration. However, there is one significant change. The notice procedure is extended to cases involving works, to which it did not previously apply. In such cases, whether by notice or by order, an authority may, in future, resort to the use of temporary restriction or prohibition when it considers that necessary or expedient.

The notice procedure also extends to traffic restrictions that are necessary or expedient for the purpose of street cleaning. Under subsection (3), authorities are required to have regard to the existence of suitable alternative routes when considering making a temporary restriction or prohibition, whether by means of an order or by means of a notice.

New section 14 (4) defines the scope of the provisions that can be made by temporary order or notice, including the power to impose speed limits. I think that that could be important. That follows section 14 of the 1984 Act, with the additional inclusion of the power—under section 4(1) of that Act—in respect of traffic signs to identify the parts of a road to which the order or notice applies. Safeguards preserving pedestrian access to premises are retained. That is very important, because, when engaging in bureaucratic manoeuvrings, it is easy to forget that under these arrangements we must be sure that the public are safe, that shopkeepers do not have their premises obstructed and that those wishing to get to their homes can do so in safety and with reasonable facility.

Subparagraph (5) deals with alternative roads and follows the general trend of section 14(5) of the 1984 Act, but with two main changes. First, it will allow temporary restrictions on alternative roads by notice as well as by order. Secondly, it will allow local authorities to introduce temporary restrictions on alternative roads where they are trunk roads, with the consent of the Secretary of State, as the highway authority for that purpose. Previously, the Secretary of State would have had to make a separate order for trunk roads. In other cases, where the initiating local authority is not the responsible authority for the alternative road, prior consent must similarly be sought.

I hope that those responsible for sorting out such matters—the county council, agencies for the district council or, indeed, the Department of the Environment —will find the procedure as easy to follow as I have found this extremely helpful description of the Bill. We often take such matters too much for granted, but we owe much to those behind the scenes in the Department of Transport, not to mention the Minister. They have performed a helpful service.

I mentioned that in Committee and I repeat it because while hon. Members are also called on to deal with broader matters, including EC issues, in the end matters such as that before the House today help the man in the street to have better safety and help to improve road traffic. I owe much to the civil servants in the Minister's Department for the great efficiency they have shown in assisting me with the Bill. Indeed, there have been times in recent weeks when my attention has been diverted from this important measure, but they have always been there, anticipating my requirements. I have found their efforts extremely helpful, as I said in Committee.

We added a new clause—15—dealing with the duration of orders and notices made under clause 14. Subsection (1) provides a general time limit of 18 months for orders under clause 14. That replaces the three-month limit that currently applies outside Greater London, but that has proved unduly restrictive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is no longer in his place. In my previous incarnation, before coming to this place, there was a knock on my office door one day, in about 1973 and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East asked whether I would help draft a measure that later became the Heavy Commercial Vehicles (Controls and Regulations) Act 1973, otherwise known as the Dykes Act, or perhaps I should refer to it as the Act of the hon. Member for Harrow, East. That Act deals with matters relating to the movement of heavy commercial vehicles in and around towns.

I drafted that measure, but I cannot claim to have drafted the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Bill. I understand—I hope that I am not giving away official secrets—that my measure, for reasons that are obscure to me, was drafted by the most eminent parliamentary counsel in the land. Hence I was surprised when, in Committee, a few amendments had to be made. I suppose

that the first parliamentary counsel, like all parliamentary lawyers, is occasionally in need of a little second thought. I believe that the Bill is one of the best examples of its kind, so my congratulations are due to him for the way in which he, too, has conducted the Bill.

New section 15(1) replaces that three-month limit, but an exception is made for orders in respect of footpaths, bridleways, cycle tracks or byways

"open to all traffic, for more than six months"

duration. There follow a number of other provisions dealing with works order, and subsection (2) provides that a works order under the new clause 14(1)(a) can last longer than 18 months if necessary, so long as that is made clear in the order and the order is revoked as soon as the works are completed.

Subsection (3) makes similar provision to that in section 9 of the 1984 Act in respect of experimental orders, namely, giving a power to the Secretary of State, where a follow-on permanent order is proposed, to approve the extension of a temporary order for a further limited period to avoid any hiatus while the necessary procedural steps are taken to bring the permanent order into effect.

Subsection (4) provides that the Secretary of State can exercise his powers under subsection (3) only at the request of the authority which made the temporary order.

Subsection (5) provides for six months' time limit for orders in respect of footpaths, bridleways, cycle tracks or byways open to all traffic and reflects the view that reinstatement of the status quo ante should generally be possible within a shorter period than may be practicable elsewhere. However, the subsection preserves the powers of the Secretary of State, under section 15(2) of the 1984 Act, to authorise the continuation of restrictions for a further period at the request of the order-making authority.

I see that my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford are exchanging ideas on this spellbinding occasion. They are no doubt working out how long they will speak—or perhaps how quickly. I trust that the circumstances that arose last year, when the Opposition gave the Bill an undiluted and enthusiastic welcome, will be repeated on this occasion. I sense from the expression on the face of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford that she is enthusiastic about the Bill and happy to co-operate with its passage.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. If he were to speed up, I should be even more grateful and more likely to support the Bill.

Mr. Cash: That is encouraging because I was coming to the same conclusion. I should be delighted to bring my contribution to as speedy an end as possible because everything that I needed to say is now on the record. Indeed, some things that I did not need to say and some that I did not want to have to say are also on the record. I am now glad to be able to sit down so that the Minister can pick up the threads of this convoluted, technical, procedural Bill which, none the less, I hope will prove to be a useful adjunct to the statute book.

1.46 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I am grateful for the opportunity to take up the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). The Bill is important and my hon. Friend does himself a disservice in suggesting that it is unglamourous. The presence of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) shows the importance that she attaches to the Bill. Ministers and Opposition spokesmen are not often here on a Friday to discuss such important business.

One of the principal reasons why the Government welcome the Bill is that it will usefully strengthen the powers of traffic authorities in dealing with the temporary regulation of traffic.

Authorities face a growing challenge to manage traffic effectively, particularly as car ownership levels increase and traffic on our roads continues to grow. We should, perhaps, remember that during the 1950s, motor vehicle traffic in Britain doubled. It doubled again in the 1960s and during the 1970s and '80s it doubled yet again. At the end of the last decade the total figure for road traffic was 400 billion vehicle kilometres per annum. National road traffic forecasts suggest that it will continue to increase. Car ownership could increase by between 30 and 50 per cent. by the year 2005.

Until cars are used much less than at present, there will be more traffic on our roads. To put that in context, Britain currently has significantly fewer cars on its roads than do many of our European partners. For example, 1988 figures show that, in terms of cars and taxis per thousand population, the United Kingdom came seventh highest among the 12 member states of the European Community and was also behind Austria, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. Therefore, contrary to some people's suggestions, Britain does not have more cars on its roads per head of population than any other country in Europe. Indeed, we are well down the league table.

With this growth in traffic has also come a dramatic increase in road works, not least because of the need to repair worn-out services and the burgeoning demand for cable communications. This, and the continuing requirement to maintain highways under the pressure of higher traffic volumes, makes it all the more pressing, therefore, that we find appropriate measures for managing temporary works to minimise their disruption to traffic flow. I shall be saying a few words about the Government's proposals on that later, but first I shall return to my hon. Friend's Bill.

It is based on proposals that emerged some years ago from a joint working group between the local authorities and my Department on traffic and parking matters. The Tapwork group, as it became known, produced a report in 1987 with a variety of proposals for improving the law and administrative procedures in traffic and parking. A number of its recommendations have subsequently borne fruit. For example, new procedures for local authorities' traffic orders were made in 1989. In that same year, another private Member's Bill was brought forward to extend the scope of parking equipment available for use by authorities. That passed successfully through both Houses and became the Parking Act 1989. Further recommendations have also been carried into the Road Traffic Bill this Session, which—as hon. Members know—is now in Committee in another place.

The main recommendations on temporary traffic regulation in the Tapwork report contained in B1-B12 in annex B to the report, were well received and are embodied in the measure before the House today. The Bill contains a collection of measures which, taken together, should help to streamline the current procedures and reduce

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

bureaucracy. Of course, that means reducing the unnecessary costs which would otherwise be borne by local authorities.

A major component of the Bill is that it will largely remove the involvement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, from decisions on the merits of temporary traffic regulation. That is properly a matter for the relevant local authorities. They can be expected to act responsibly in those matters, just as in matters involving permanent traffic orders, where they have direct responsibility. There has been a progressive devolution of powers over time. It is right to take a further step in that direction.

The residual role for the Department will be, first, to provide for continuity, where the traffic authority is proposing to make a permanent traffic order and requires additional time to put the necessary arrangements in place —that is in new section 15(3)—and, secondly, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, in respect of orders affecting footpaths and bridleways where the permitted period of restriction is only six months instead of 18 months, but may be extended by the Secretary of State, on the request of the authority, if he is satisfied that the circumstances warrant it, that is in new section 15(5).

My hon. Friend has already commented on a number of the other provisions in the Bill. I welcome, for example, the provision that will allow a single order to be made covering both local authority roads and trunk roads, with the Secretary of State's consent. That is in new section 14(5). Everyone will agree that it does not make sense to have to proceed with two separate orders on trunk roads and local authority roads, as current law requires.

In the context of provision on alternative routes, the Bill also includes some helpful enhancements. More emphasis is given, in the new section 14(3), to the need to have regard to the availability of alternative routes, whether the temporary restriction is by means of an order or a notice.

New powers are also included in the new section 14(8), which will allow the traffic authority to suspend any free parking place on an alternative route. That might be necessary for a brief period to avoid congestion on that alternative route while additional traffic has been diverted on to it.

Appropriate provision is made in clause 1(3) for the erection of the necessary traffic signs in connection with temporary restrictions. It goes without saying, perhaps, that proper signing is as important for short duration traffic regulation as it is in any other case. Of equal importance is to ensure that works are properly guarded for the benefit of the road user and those working on the road.

I am sure that the House would welcome a little information on the relationship between the Bill and the Government's New Roads and Street Works Bill which is still before the House and has not yet received Royal Assent. That Bill seeks to bring about the long overdue reform of the Public Utilities Streetworks Act 1950. It aims to sort out the present confused responsibility for utility street works by making utilities fully responsible for their own works. It will allow utilities to carry out their own street works much more efficiently. It places a duty on highway authorities to co-ordinate their own and utilities' street works, so as to minimise disruption and end the frustration caused when the same stretch of road is repeatedly dug up. Undertakers will be required to co-operate with the authorities and each other in co-ordinating works.

The Bill should help to improve the environment by reducing the amount of street works activity, with its fumes, noise and congestion and by bringing about better quality of work and surface reinstatement. It should also improve safety by means of the new provisions for signing, lighting and guarding works, with the disabled particularly in mind, and by means of requirements for the training of workmen and supervisors. We attach great importance to that. Our intention is to approve a code of practice giving practical guidance to undertakers on how best to ensure that these objectives are met. The code will be based on the revised chapter 8 of the Department's traffic signs manual.

The significant point is this: where it is necessary to restrict or prohibit road traffic for temporary periods, traffic authorities rely on the powers in sections 14 to 16 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. It is those powers which my hon. Friend's Bill will strengthen and improve. So this Bill is an important adjunct to the Government's wider measure.

As hon. Members will know, where temporary traffic regulation is introduced in connection with road works by utilities, the Government's Bill allows traffic authorities to recover costs from the utilities—both administrative costs and costs of necessary traffic signing. That is a sound principle and one which was acknowledged in the Tapwork recommendations from which this Bill has emerged.

Of course, had my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) been successful with his Bill last Session, there would have been no need for the consequential provisions which now appear in schedule 2 to the Bill. The Government's Bill could have taken everything into account. But it is a tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford that he has ensured compatibility between his Bill and the New Roads and Street Works Bill. The technical amendments agreed in Committee complete that task. We anticipate that the New Roads and Street Works Bill will be brought into force first. This Bill, if agreed, will then tidy up the drafting by repealing provisions rendered redundant in schedule 8 to the New Roads and Street Works Bill.

The Bill also seeks to provide flexibility on the matter of the permitted duration of restrictions under the more rapid notice procedure. At present, a notice allows a restriction for up to 14 days. That is in the existing section 15(5) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The Bill extends this to 21 days, but provides additional circumstances in which a short five-day notice may be used. That includes temporary restrictions for street cleaning purposes and temporary restrictions connected with road works. In many cases, the need for major works in the highway is known well in advance and can be dealt with through the temporary order-making procedure, but the new short duration notice can be useful for unforeseen circumstances.

There is power in new section 15(7) for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to alter the number of days—five and 21—if experience suggests that that is needed. That gives a welcome opportunity to fine-tune the arrangements if occasion demands. It would be achieved by means of regulations, subject to the

negative resolution procedure. That is in line with the philosophy reflected in the New Roads and Street Works Bill—to ensure that the Government and authorities are not hamstrung by too much detailed legislation which then becomes outmoded over time and which, because it is primary legislation, cannot be amended, even though everyone recognises the need for amendment.

The temporary restriction of traffic is never welcomed by those affected by it, but authorities are under a general duty to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of the highway and to prevent its stopping up or obstruction as far as possible. The New Roads and Street Works Bill reinforces those duties and provides added incentives for speedy completion of works by public utilities. The Bill ensures that, where the requirement for temporary regulation exists, for whatever reason, there is the necessary procedural and administrative mechanism to ensure its effective application and proper implementation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford referred to the role of the first parliamentary counsel in drafting the Bill and he drew attention to the fact that a couple of amendments were agreed in Committee. In fairness to the first parliamentary counsel, he should not be criticised. The amendments became necesary because the Bill had to be brought up to date to reflect the passage of other Bills and a new schedule was added to the Bill. Every cloud has a silver lining. The fact that last year's Bill did not reach the statute book has enabled this year's Bill to take account of other legislation before the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford has a distinguished history, not only as an hon. Member, but before he became a Member, of dealing with legislation and drafting Bills. He has demonstrated his expertise once again in the way in which he has successfully steered the Bill through Second Reading, Committee and Report to Third Reading. He hopes, no doubt, that it will receive plaudits when it goes to the other place and that it will soon be on the statute book. It is a great pleasure to know that the Opposition welcome the Bill. I hope that the House will give it a warm welcome later today. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford on the way in which he has handled the Bill and I commend it to the House.

2.1 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I apologise to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) for the fact that I was not in my place when he rose to address the House. I do so only because he has drawn the attention of the House to that fact. He might have noticed that I have been in and out of the Chamber frequently and that I have been here since the start of business this morning. It is due to the ludicrous procedures of the House that I was unable to know at what point the Bill would proceed.

I do not intend to speak for long because I am very much aware that hon. Members who spoke for some hours before the hon. Member for Stafford rose were doing so in an effort to take the maximum time for two Bills to prevent the Pig Husbandry Bill from reaching the Chamber for debate. I regret that very much. I regret, as the hon. Member for Stafford does, the filibustering that caused problems for the precursor to this Bill. I regret that that has happened again this morning and that another worthy measure will not receive proper time and attention in the House.

As the hon. Member for Stafford and the Minister said, the Bill is important. It contains measures that, although small in themselves, will have considerable consequences. As the hon. Member for Stafford said, it seems that the Department of Transport wished the Bill to be introduced and that, behind the scenes, it has done the work and provided considerable assistance to the hon. Gentleman.

It may sometimes be justifiable to produce such measures and to make them available to those who are successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills. However, I am not sure that the Bill needed to come to the House in its present form. Perhaps it could simply have been subsumed in the procedures on two important transport Bills. The Minister has referred to the Road Traffic Bill and to the New Roads and Street Works Bill. I have been the lead member of the Front-Bench team for the Opposition during the procedures on both Bills. I am glad to tell the hon. Member for Stafford that we have been able to proceed with reasonable consensus on the major provisions in those Bills and that this Bill is complementary to them.

Mr. Cash: Can the hon. Lady tell the House which Opposition spokesman will be handling the Bill in the House of Lords? Lord Brougham and Vaux has kindly agreed to take on the Bill when it arrives in the House of Lords and to put forward our arguments. I hope that there will be no argument at all, but I should like to know whether we shall be able to maintain the same comity and co-operation and that the person who takes the Bill through the Lords is the same as the one who took it through previously, as that will maintain the splendid continuity.

Ms. Ruddock: I undertake to speak to my colleagues in another place to signal our attitude and to say that I hope that the same attitude will be demonstrated there.

The Bill is complementary to other Bills on which we have been prepared to co-operate. Indeed, I hope that we have added to and improved those measures. As the hon. Member for Stafford and the Minister said, it is important to restrict traffic temporarily because of the increasing number of necessary road works. That is why we support the Bill. We supported a similar Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and we regret that that Bill fell in the way that it did, making it necessary to use the valuable time of the House again. The filibustering was unnecessary. We welcome the Bill and I congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford on his success in bringing the Bill thus far.

Mr. Cash: We very much appreciate the attendance of the chief Opposition spokesman on transport on this important occasion. He pays considerable attention to these matters. Furthermore, when one sees him on television——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not see that that has anything to do with Third Reading.

Ms. Ruddock: I fear that the hon. Member for Stafford is getting anxious because we might finish consideration of the Bill rather early and the Pig Husbandry Bill may receive another hearing. The hon. Gentleman should not try to help his hon. Friends who wish to frustrate that measure by adding to the time taken for debate on his Bill. If he presses me, he might find that I am not so keen on his Bill. I was about to conclude.

Mr. Chope: Does the hon. Lady accept that the Government are not against the Pig Husbandry Bill and also that the Government closely considered the options for incorporating the provisions of the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Bill into another Bill? Obviously, if that had been done, we should have saved time. Will the hon. Lady accept that it was because we were unable to do that that we decided to support this private Member's Bill?

Ms. Ruddock: I am happy to accept the second statement that the Minister made. Whether or not the Government are for the Pig Husbandry Bill, on occasions like this, there seems to be an understanding with the Government which is demonstrated by the length of the Minister's speeches—not the Minister present now, however. I shall not allow that to happen any more by allowing further interventions. I shall sit down after congratulating the hon. Member for Stafford on his success thus far. I hope that, with our support, his Bill will reach the statute book.

Pig Husbandry Bill

Order read for consideration, as amended (in the Standing Committee).

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question, That the order for consideration of the Bill be discharged and the Bill withdrawn.

Question again proposed.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With amendment No. 5, it will be convenient to consider amendments Nos. 1, 6 and 2. Not moved.

With amendment No. 3, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 4. Not moved.

Consideration completed.

Third reading what day?

Sir Richard Body: Today, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Queen's consent? Not given. Third Reading what day?

Sir Richard Body: Friday next.

Nurse Prescribing Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.9 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time. This is an unusual occasion——

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether the Question on Queen's consent, in respect of my Bill, may be put again now that a Privy Councillor is here. I am gratified to see that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Privy Council Office is in his place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret that we cannot go back.

Mr. Fishburn: It is unusual for a 10-minute rule Bill to reach its Second Reading. Ten-minute rule Bills usually serve the purpose of presenting a particular aspect of policy that needs the spotlight of attention, but today's Second Reading gives the Bill a glimmer of the light of seriousness.

The Bill will enable nurses—29,000 community nurses, in the first instance—to write prescriptions for a limited number of products so that patients who are ill at home are able to receive them without having to go to their general practitioner's surgery to get his signature. The Bill does not cover advanced drugs or complicated matters that require diagnosis; it would permit nurses to write prescriptons for such items as bandages, wound treatments, bedpads for those who are incontinent at home and for pain killers—the type of regular medical products for cases in which a community nurse will know exactly what is required and will be as well informed about the patient's needs as would any GP. For that reason, the Bill has been welcomed not merely by the Royal College of Nursing, but by the British Medical Association. Indeed, it has the support of almost everyone in the national health service because it is realised that the Bill will strip back one layer of the onion skin of bureaucracy. It will allow patients and nurses to work out in straightforward cases what medicaments and medical products are required and to get them to the patient as quickly as possible.

Getting this far has already been a long process. The Bill is not an idea that I pulled out of a hat. There have been no fewer than three reports in Britain on the subject —the Cumberledge report, a Select Committee report and the Department of Health's own report, the Crown report. All three reports advocated nurses writing prescriptions for a limited number of products. That practice is already in place in other countries, most notably in Canada and the United States. The Department of Health agrees that the practice should be allowed in this country within the next few years. My only disagreement with the Government is how soon we can put these sensible reforms in place. This afternoon, we have an opportunity to jump the gun and to let the Bill go ahead as quickly as possible. The medical profession is ready for it, and 29,000 community nurses are ready—they have trained for the project and they know the list of medical products against which they could write a prescription. It is time for us to press ahead.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will have sensible reasons for saying that we should progress more slowly and perhaps have another cost benefit analysis. There is considerable pressure from the nurses and from doctors and general practitioners for the proposal to go ahead. It will cost nothing. It will greatly diminish suffering by allowing nurses to provide the right medicine with the minimum amount of delay. It will be a step forward. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is sympathetic towards it. I hope that the proposal will be accepted as quickly as possible.

2.15 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) on his skill and determination in pressing his case for nurse prescribing. He has done very well to introduce his ten-minute Bill and to secure today's debate. I hope to convince him strongly of our sympathy for his cause and to offer him clear hope for the future.

The Government are fully committed to the idea of nurse prescribing. In one of my first speaking engagements as Minister for Health I said that, barring insurmountable obstacles, nurse prescribing would become a reality in the 1990s. Supporting the general idea of nurse prescribing does not mean that we can leap over some of the details that must be worked out. I hope to explain that we are making extremely good headway on overcoming the issues and concerns that have been identified.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington knows, the Cumberledge report on community nursing recommended that

"the DHSS should agree a limited list of simple agents which may be prescribed by nurses as part of the nursing care programme and issue guidelines to enable nurses to control drug dosage in well defined circumstances."

We accepted the recommendation in principle and established the advisory group on nurse prescribing, chaired by Dr. June Crown, to advise

"how arrangements for the supply of drugs, dressings, appliances and chemical reagents to patients as part of their nursing care in the community might be improved by enabling such items to be prescribed by a nurse, taking into account where necessary current practice and likely developments in other areas of nursing practice."

We are grateful to the advisory group on nurse prescribing for its excellent work. It made many recommendations, the central one being that nurses in the community with a district nurse or health visitor qualification should be allowed to prescribe items necessary for the care of conditions for which they take professional responsibility. In addition, nurses with a district nurse or health visitor qualification and certain specialist nurses in the community should be able to supply patients with items within a group protocol and to adjust the time and dosage of medicines.

The report was published and issued for comment in December 1989. In total, 330 responses were received from the four United Kingdom countries. They included replies from health authorities, family health service authorities, medical, pharmacist and nursing organisations, from individual nurses, trade unions and pharmaceutical companies. In general, commentators were in favour of implementing the recommendations in the report.

However, the report had identified various issues requiring additional work before final decisions could be taken and a schedme implemented. There are four main issues and my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington, who has worked closely with me and with the nursing organisations, is aware of many of them. First, there

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

needed to be an authoritative cost-benefit analysis. Secondly, the consequences for education and training needed to be identified and schemes established. Thirdly, the precise type of drugs that nurses can prescribe needed to be settled and, finally, detailed administrative arrangements needed to be worked out.

Those are obviously important aspects that are vital to establishing a viable and successful scheme and they need detailed attention. We are taking them all forward at the same time, but the work cannot be completed overnight to allow immediate legislation.

Perhaps the most important area requiring further work is the assessment of the cost and benefits of the report's recommendations. We all realise that nurse prescribing will bring benefits to patients and staff, but, as the report recognised, a more thorough study of those benefits and a full assessment of costs are needed before the final decisions about implementation may be made. Therefore, we have commissioned the management consultants Touche Ross to carry out a full cost-benefit analysis.

The consultants are collecting data from a representative sample of health authorities and family health service authorities, through interviews and questionnaires, to discover how nurse prescribing would affect community nurses, GPs, hospitals, pharmacists and patients. In their assessment, they have been asked to include the resource effects of potential changes in the volume and type of drugs, bandages and dressings prescribed, and in the number of pharmacists dispensing fees; any additional training required; necessary administrative arrangements; and any changes in the time worked by nurses and GPs.

The consultants' report is due at the end of August. We would hope to take decisions about implementation soon after. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington will agree that that is a swift timetable for action. However, there are details and complexities which need to be considered and tackled properly for fear that otherwise they will emerge at a later date and will cause difficulty when a Bill goes through this place.

As I have said, much work is also being carried out on the other issues identified in the advisory group's report. The United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting is working on the education and training implications. We have asked it to let us have its initial views about the training programme by the end of June. Once the training requirements have been established, it will, of course, be necessary to devise training materials and to train the trainers before appropriately qualified nurses could start their top-up training.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington will also be aware of our great commitment to nurses' education. Recently, I was able to announce a further 14 Project 2000 courses and £71 million is being spent on Project 2000 this year. We are well aware that training and the development of professionalism in our nurses are fundamental to the health service's ability to provide high-quality patient care. Two issues will have to be tackled: initially, the training of the 28,000 community nurses, district nurses and health visitors who, it is thought, are the most appropriate groups to undertake nurse prescribing; and, secondly, the way in which that training can be incorporated in the mainstream of training for nurses who plan to join those groups. No training can take place until we have finalised the details of the formulary.

This month, officials will be meeting members of the joint formulary committee of the British National Formulary to ask them to set up a nurse practitioners formulary sub-committee, along the lines of the dental practitioners sub-committee, to advise us about the appropriate contents of the nurse formulary. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington identified, in general terms, the items that it was expected that nurses should be able to prescribe. However, he will be the first to recognise that, when it comes to deciding exactly where the demarcation line should go, there are a number of complex issues to be resolved. We expect that the sub-committee will need about a year to complete its work. If, as is likely, the nurse practitioners formulary contains prescription-only medicines, we will need it to liaise with the Medicines Commission about appropriate procedures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington will understand that it is important to have discussions with pharmacists, general practitioners, nurses and with a great range of experts to ensure that they all properly understand how the arrangements should be carried out.

There is also the question of the link with general practitioners and, for example, the way in which the prescribing scheme works. We have made good headway in recent years on thoughtful prescribing. There is a strong initiative to ensure that patients receive the drugs that they need and I have no doubt that there is a place for nurse prescribing within that framework. However, we need to be sure that we have the details right as we move forward to legislation. We are also carrying out work to establish the administrative arrangements for the introduction of nurse prescribing. Officials have already had detailed discussions with the Prescription Pricing Authority about pricing mechanisms and arrangements for providing information about nurse prescribers' prescribing. In due course other practical details will have to be sorted out, such as the design of the prescription pad.

My hon. Friend will be aware that in our determination to provide a high-quality health service to patients, we need to make sure that all our professional groups work to the maximum of their ability. Indeed, 95 per cent. of health care takes place in the community. Now that we have implemented the main part of the NHS side of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, we are swiftly moving towards implementation of the community care aspects. The link between the health service and social service departments in implementing care in the community is essential. The role played by community nurses, health visitors and district nurses and the full contribution that they can make is a matter to which we have given careful consideration.

Recently we produced a report under the chairmanship of Sheila Roy, a regional nursing officer, on nursing in the community. It described the various models of provision of community nursing, whether attached to GP practices, working essentially on a patch system or under the different models which are becoming commonplace in various parts of the country. All are agreed that the role, status and standing of nurses, in whom the public and the Government have great confidence, must be addressed comprehensively and thoroughly.

We have reorganised nurse management in the Department. Nurses are the largest group in the NHS.

They provide the hands-on, direct patient care. They understand the patient and especially the patient within the community.

I hope that I have made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington today that we see a clear role for nurses and an opportunity for them to develop and evolve their skills. I cannot give detailed support to my hon. Friend's Bill, but I assure him unequivocally that I have carefully noted his points. I value the contribution that he made by introducing the Bill. We shall work with determination and all possible urgency to give effect to the aims for which he has so effectively worked and the measure for which he argued in the House today.

2.26 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I join my hon. Friend the Minister in warmly congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) on the measure that he has introduced today. As a former deputy mayor of the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, I have kept in close touch with my hon. Friend's borough, and still live in it. I am well aware of the amount of work that he puts in on behalf of his constituents. I am also aware that he is tireless in bringing to the House interesting, imaginative and fresh proposals which could help not only his constituents but the entire country.

It is a truism to say that, whenever our constituents go into hospital they agree that a body of people has been absolutely fantastic in the level of care, sympathy and expertise given to the patients. Those people are the nurses.

I recently spent a weekend at Whipps Cross hospital, which serves my constituency. I arrived at 9 am on Saturday and left at 5 pm on Monday, having spent the time in between closely shadowing a junior hospital doctor and discovering the amount of time that junior doctors have to put in. I also discovered that the amount of work which nurses put in is beyond compare. I hold in high esteem the body of nurses who serve Whipps Cross hospital, as I know my constituents do.

It was encouraging and heartening that my hon. Friend the Minister gave such a positive reaction to the principles behind the Bill. The timetable that she set out in her speech was swift and encouraging. It is true that we need to get the Bill absolutely right to avoid the risk of spoiling the good measures which it introduces by bringing them in too hastily. The Bill is of considerable excellence.

I have one reservation. If nurses are allowed to prescribe drugs, even minor drugs, which would in no way endanger or cause an adverse reaction in the patient unless the patient was taking some other form of drug and that combination——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

Private Members' Bills

TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCILS BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I understand that the Bill is not printed. Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

PUBLIC SAFETY INFORMATION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [8 February].

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WATER REQUIREMENTS (PLANNING) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [19 April].

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

GARDEN SUPPLIES (SUNDAY TRADING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

BUILDING CONVERSION AND ENERGY CONSERVATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELITIS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

YOUNG PERSONS (ALCOHOL ABUSE) ETC. BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

LEASEHOLD REFORM BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that this Bill is not printed. Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

FORESTRY COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that this Bill is not printed. Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

TRADE DESCRIPTIONS (ANIMAL TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

PARISH COUNCILS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

COAL IMPORTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

HOSPITAL SCHOOLS IN LONDON BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 May.

SOCIAL SECURITY (CONTRIBUTIONS) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Social Security (Contributions) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, if the Social Security (Contributions) Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed, and that as soon as the proceedings on any Resolutions come to by the House on Social Security (Contributions) Bill [Money] and Social Security (Contributions) Bill [Ways and Means] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

HOUSE OF COMMONS (SERVICES)

Ordered,

That Mr. Alastair Goodlad be discharged from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) and Mr. David Lightbown be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

London City Ballet

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I am pleased to be able to raise today the important matter of the future of the London City Ballet. Although I appreciate the fact that the Minister for the Arts will respond, I recognise that I am effectively speaking through him to the Arts Council, which is responsible for the distribution and monitoring of grant received from the Government and taxpayers to individual arts organisations.

It would be wrong for the Government to intervene directly in this or any other application for grant, for three reasons. First, although the Government set out the objectives of arts policy of high standards, innovation and access to all races and income groups, it would be constitutionally wrong and impracticable for them to try to second-guess the Arts Council on the distribution of no less than £162 million-worth of grant in 1991-92, increasing to £201 million in 1992-93, £18 million of which is allocated to dance. The Government's responsibility is to ensure that the Arts Council acts effectively in allocating its grant, to provide the Arts Council with the foundations on which to allocate funds on a long-term basis—that has been achieved recently by the introduction of the three-year settlement—and to ensure that adequate levels of funding are available to it.

Funding from the Government to the Arts Council has risen threefold in real terms since the 1960s. The central Government grant to the arts in 1991-92 is £561 million, which is a 55 per cent. real-terms increase on 1979-80 and a 5 per cent. increase on last year. That the Government are generously fulfilling their responsibilities is shown by the fact that audiences for Arts Council-sponsored productions have risen from 7 million to 10 million in the past five years. In addition, the Government have set a tax regime, especially in the past five years, that encourages giving to charitable causes, including the arts. Gift aid in 1990 was an example, and the business sponsorship incentive scheme of three or four years ago led to a substantial increase in private giving and sponsorship.

Secondly, I do not believe that the Government should involve themselves directly in the needs of London City Ballet because it meets the criteria for funding laid down by the Arts Council. It is an example, par excellence, of the sort of company that ought to get Arts Council funding under its existing criteria. Moreover, London City Ballet is seeking not unconditional funding, but funding conditional on additional funds being available for the next year, and assurances to that effect.

There is no doubt about the quality of London City Ballet. It was founded in 1978, and now has 32 dancers and 19 musicians. It specialises in bringing middle-scale classical ballets—although its repertoire is wider than that —to income groups that may not previously have been able to afford to watch them, on a touring basis. Testimony to its quality has come from the chairman of the Arts Council's dance panel, Mr. Ward Jackson, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) who said today that the company was an outstanding ambassador of excellence. Dame Ninette de Valois, no less, has also spoken of the excellence of its performances.

London City Ballet has 11 per cent. of the national ballet audience, and up to 23 per cent.—nearly a quarter—of regional ballet audiences. That has been reflected at the box office. Over the past four years, the number of people watching London City Ballet has risen from 78,000 to 153,000. I doubt whether that record could be bettered elsewhere. Its average audience has been 85 per cent. of capacity. Last Christmas, its performance of Cinderella at Sadler's Wells achieved average capacities of no less than 93 per cent. Its valuable work was recognised in 1983 when it received the patronage of the Princess of Wales.

All that has been achieved without any basic funding from the Arts Council, beyond a small touring grant to subsidise venues that would otherwise not be viable. Neither has the company gone into financial deficit, on either an annual or a cumulative basis. It has had tremendous support from the business sector. It would be remiss of me if I did not pay a warm tribute to John Hughes, the chairman of London City Ballet, who has been the driving force behind the company for the past 10 years. He has supported it, often at great personal expense in energy, time and financially.

As I said, the Arts Council should support the London City Ballet because it exactly meets the criteria which the Arts Council lays down for funding. The council, according to a letter that it sent me recently, divides its funding into three categories. The first is artistic performance and a commitment to new work.

I have spoken of the standards of excellence for which the LCB has become renowned. It has performed all the major ballets—in the last year, Swan Lake and Giselle—and has extended its repertoire to a number of one-act more modern ballets. For example, Counter Balance was choreographed by Vincent Redmon specifically for the company. Graduation Ball and Three Dances to Japanese Music are further examples.

This year, the company already has sponsorship for a one-act ballet entitled Witchboy by Jack Carter and sponsorship for Les Patineurs by Frederick Ashton. As a result of that innovative activity, a number of well-known and up and coming British choreographers such as Christopher Bruce, Glen Tetley and Hans von Manen, have expressed a desire to work with the company.

The Arts Council looks, secondly, at a company's strategic role and in particular at the effectiveness of its educational work and ability to attract and broaden audiences. The LCB started its educational programme in 1983. It is fully sponsored by British Petroleum. It goes into primary and secondary schools in the areas where it is touring and it even holds workshops at a London school for physically handicapped children. In total 2,000 children throughout the country will benefit this year in educational terms from the LCB, and 10,000 have benefited since 1985.

As for attracting and broadening audiences, I have spoken of the large increase in audiences to whom the company has played. Barclays Bank wrote to the chairman of the Arts Council on 22 March this year saying:

"Our association with this company is being productive and beneficial. Our objective in sponsoring them is to reach, through them, the large non-metropolitan high street audience that is the heartland of our UK customer base. No other company offers such a concentrated reach and appeal, and classical dance has always shown up in our research to be the most widely accessible of the performing arts."

On the basis of that, from the point of view of attracting and broadening audiences, the London City Ballet can rest its case.

The third category at which the Arts Council looks is organisational effectiveness and value for money. That is the area where the LCB has its strongest case, even though it is strong in the other areas. It employs only 78 people, yet it tours to 26 different venues every year. In 1990-91, those venues stretched from Guildford and Cheltenham in the south to Hereford, Nottingham and Wolverhampton in the midlands and from Billingham in the north-east to Inverness, Glasgow and Aberdeen in Scotland. That demonstrates the broad appeal of the company to regional and international audiences.

That has been achieved with an average ticket price—I am not sure of the average ticket prices on tour of the other six major national ballets—of £8·90 per seat, which most people will agree is extremely good value for money for classical ballet.

When the Arts Council considers organisational effectiveness, it looks at a company's ability to earn its own income. London City Ballet has a strong advantage in absolute terms and compared to other classical dance companies. The strongest point that it can make is that, if the Arts Council invests in it on a seed corn basis, it will retain sponsorship in the arts which may otherwise be lost to the arts. One has only to compare its sponsorship position with that of other companies, to see what I mean. This year, the company has a sponsorship of £583,000 of a total £1·7 million budget. That includes sponsorship from Barclays Bank, Texaco, BP, Nestlé and the Bankers Trust. It receives no less than 32 per cent. of its income through sponsorship. That is more than the sponsorship income of the Northern Ballet Company and the English National Ballet combined, which, together, receive some £3·5 million in public fundings a year. Of the six major ballet companies, the company that comes next in the table of those who receive the most sponsorship receives only 14 per cent. Therefore, I should have thought that, when London City Ballet is compared to other companies that receive public subsidy—that is meant to be a criterion for public funding from the Arts Council—its case is well and truly made.

It is small wonder that, in 1987, London City Ballet received the Association of British Sponsorship of the Arts award. Since that time, its business sponsorship has risen threefold, which is an unparalleled record of attracting income from outside. Nevertheless, although it has increased dramatically its sponsorship income and its box office income through larger audiences—as much as can be expected through rising seat prices—and those increases represent 76 per cent. of its budget, there remains a gap of some £500,000 to £600,000 a year that must be met through fund raising or donations. Such problems are not peculiar to London City Ballet, which is asking for help from the Arts Council to meet that sum.

London City Ballet is a high-quality company, which has grown rapidly and gives access to regional audiences and middle and lower income groups. It has an excellent education programme, is extremely well managed and has an unequalled record on fund raising. Although the Arts Council may be unable to give absolute assurances about its funding for 1992-93, it should at least be able to say whether, if additional funding is available to it—as I anticipate from the long-range figures that I have been given—companies such as London City Ballet will be

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

given priority consideration when allocations are considered. Otherwise, it is a sad fact that, on 17 May, notice will be given to existing staff and, on 30 June, the company may have to close down. We are still some way from that, but action taken by the Arts Council with the possible encouragement of the Minister for the Arts, within his existing budget, can save that company and the valuable work that it does for classical ballet.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman have the leave of the Minister and of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) to speak?

Hon. Members: No.

2.49 pm

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): I regret that time is pressing and as I have some serious comments for my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) about the future of the London City Ballet, in those circumstances I have to come to the Dispatch Box now.

I listened with close attention to what my hon. Friend said. I acknowledge his keen interest in the London City Ballet and his close association with it. I am well aware of the work of the London City Ballet. I attended the performance of Cinderella at Sadler's Wells to which he referred. It was highly enjoyable. Would that I were a fairy godmother so that, with a wave of my magic wand, I could dispel the financial problems that my hon. Fried has outlined so concisely. But, alas, life is not so easy, particularly with the problems and many demands on arts funding.

My job, as my hon. Friend recognises, is to try to secure an adequate increase in Government provision to the arts, as my predecessors the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury were notably successful in doing in recent years. However, it is not my job to decide precisely how that provision should be allocated. Those detailed decisions have to be taken by the Arts Council with the benefit of its expert art form panels which are best placed to make those decisions, but they always involve hard choices.

I wholly agree with my hon. Friend that the London City Ballet is an arts company which has given a great deal of pleasure. It is a middle-scale touring company. That means that it performs in theatres with between 300 and 1,200 seats and brings classical ballet to a varied audience, not just in London but in 24 regional theatres, 15 of which are not visited by other middle-scale ballet companies. However, I am assured that the Arts Council would want to consider what touring ballet provision could be made for those theatres if the London City Ballet were no longer able to perform there.

The ballet's audience includes a good proportion of school children and it is clearly a popular company. I have received representations from many people, including Dame Beryl Grey, the prima ballerina whom I have seen dancing so often in the past and who is a trustee of the London City Ballet.

It is also special because, as my hon. Friend said, it has grown and prospered without sustained public funding. It gets a high percentage of its income from box office. The rest has come from generous private donations and from enthusiastic business sponsorship. Its development so far is a great tribute to what determined private sector support can bring to the arts. Responsible business management also means that it is free of debt. Yet my hon. Friend has brought the matter to the House because its existence is now under threat. No one wants to see LCB close, least of all me. So why is there a problem?

Let me spend a few moments on the relationship between the LCB and the Arts Council. The Arts Council has already provided some help to LCB: a modest amount from its small project grants up to 1987-88 and more substantial support from its touring budget for performances in particular venues. London City Ballet received £100,000 in 1989-90 and 1990-91 for visits to five theatres and £89,000 in 1991-92 for visits to four.

However, LCB is not a revenue client of the Arts Council. That is at the heart of the problem to which my hon. Friend drew attention. It does not get assured annual support for the full range of its activities. LCB feels that the time has come for a firm commitment by the Arts Council to change its status into one of revenue support. The Arts Council does not at present feel that it can give that firm commitment. Without it, LCB does not believe that it can continue. Let me try to explain on the Arts Council's behalf the difficult situation it is in.

The first reason is certainly the huge growth in dance. Dance activity in Britain is now more buoyant than ever before. It is also increasingly diverse. Audiences are now offered and welcome a wide choice of dance forms—classical ballet, new and contemporary dance, ethnic dance, jazz and so on. There is great innovation and much exciting work is being developed on education and outreach, often involving children, and that means taking dance and ballet into schools and other places of education.

The increasingly diverse provision of and interest in dance and the great interest in classical ballet have meant much more demand on the Arts Council's budget for dance which, as my hon. Friend reminded us, is just over £18 million a year. Of that, almost 90 per cent. is already allocated in revenue funding to six main companies: the Royal Ballet, the Birmingham Royal Ballet, English National Ballet, Northern Ballet Theatre, the Rambert dance company and the London Contemporary Dance Theatre. And 79 per cent. of the total goes on classical ballet, including revenue support for two middle-scale ballet companies—Northern Ballet Theatre, which is now successfully establishing itself in Halifax and English National Ballet's smaller company, which will benefit from the enhancement funding that my predecessor, the present Chief Secretary, set up during his short but successful reign as Minister for the Arts. Birmingham Royal Ballet also wants to develop middle-scale theatre work, and in Scotland, Scottish Ballet offers middle-scale touring and is supported by the Scottish Arts Council.

I have given a quick impression of the variety of dance and the demand for funding for dance and ballet and of how much of the Arts Council's budget for them is regularly and firmly committed. The council therefore has a difficult choice to make within that budget. That applies not only to the dance council, but to the balance that the Arts Council should commit in support between different art forms.

As my hon. Friend can well imagine, the 1991-92 budget, decided in 1990, is already wholly committed. The main outline allocations for 1992-93 are also made under three-year funding arrangements which are designed to introduce greater stability to arts funding and the principle of which was negotiated with the Treasury by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham. Decisions by other funding bodies, such as some of the London boroughs, to withdraw support—I very much regret that —are bound to increase pressure to stretch the council's resources further.

LCB is seeking a commitment to revenue funding from 1992-93 onwards of £500,000. The Arts Council believes that it cannot honestly make that commitment ahead of the autumn negotiations with the Treasury to determine the final 1992-93 provision for the arts. My hon. Friend will agree that those negotiations are not likely to be easy. I am conscious that he is parliamentary private secretary to the Chief Secretary; it is not clear whether any increase on the provision announced for 1992-93 will be possible.

My hon. Friend said that LCB was not seeking an absolute assurance from the Arts Council. When I discussed this matter again with its chairman, Lord Palumbo, early this morning, he told me that he felt strongly that it would be irresponsible of the Arts Council to make a commitment to LCB that it cannot be sure of honouring.

The needs of LCB must be weighed against those of other clients, not only in ballet and dance, but in other art forms. I explained as much when I met the chairman of LCB, Mr. John Hughes, on 11 April. I take this opportunity of joining in the tribute that my hon. Friend paid to Mr. Hughes' dedication and commitment to LCB.

The Government wholeheartedly support and respect the work of this company for the reasons that my hon. Friend outlined, but we must make it clear that it has, from the beginning, been a private, independent company, set up by a group of committed people who wanted to run a dance company. It is a free-standing company such as the Government support. It is not a state-inspired company, but very much in the best traditions of entrepreneurship. I respect that wholeheartedly.

If a company is set up privately, the Government can help only to a limited extent and not always financially. It must be for the management of the company to decide how to deal with their changing financial position. If they decide, for what may be to them perfectly valid and understandable reasons, not to continue their support, which they have so kindly put into the company over past years, it cannot necessarily or automatically be right for the Government or for the Arts Council, acting on behalf of the Government, to step into the financial breach and pick up the obligations from which others are withdrawing.

I assure my hon. Friend that I share his concern about the London City Ballet. Like him, I much admire its achievements and the strength of sponsorship and of private sector support and commitment which underlies it. I very much hope that a solution can yet be found which will avert the risk of an early closure because I share with my hon. Friend the thought that we would all greatly regret such a closure.

3 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Minister will be aware of the widespread support for the London City Ballet, not only politically across the Floor of the House, but around the country and outside the capital. I heard what the Minister said and I understand, as does the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), the mechanism for funding. Those who support London City Ballet say that there must be a way, in view of the Government's having supported the principle of the continuation of London City Ballet and having said how much they support its work, in which the Arts Council, which wants the company to continue, and the business sponsors can work out a formula to establish the principle that funding will be assured.

I understand that there cannot be a cast-iron commitment now. However, a declaration of support from the Government is required which would allow those responsible to be able to continue until the autumn statement this year. I hope that, given the company's enormous reputation, great success and enormous popularity, that will be possible. I hope that the Minister, the chairman of the Arts Council and the company will be able to meet in the next few weeks before notices are served so that some way forward can be found.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

School-Industry Compacts

1. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of school-industry compacts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): There are 51 compacts in operation in inner-city areas across the country and a further 10 compacts in development. The network of inner-city compacts is therefore almost complete. We have made tremendous progress in the three years since the initiative was launched. As I have seen for myself, those compacts are harnessing the enthusiasm and commitment of young people and employers to help ensure we have the qualified and flexible work force that we need for the 1990s.

Mr. Coombs: I welcome the undoubted success of the schools-industry compacts programme. Does my hon. Friend agree that the links between industry and wider education are equally important? Does he welcome the news this morning that the Ford company's employee promotion programme has no fewer than 20,000—almost half its work force—signed up? Is that not evidence of the sort of improvements in industry and education that can result in a great increase in skills?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of the links between education and business in the wider sense. That is one reason why we have put an additional £3·5 million into that initiative this year. My hon. Friend referred specifically to the case of Ford, and I have talked to that company about its scheme, which is impressive. Similar arrangements have been initiated in a number of different companies, which is most welcome. One of the most interesting features is that Ford undoubtedly underestimated the extent of the demand for that facility. That shows that there is a latent demand in the work force for education and training, and we hope to build on that.

Catering Industry

2. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to improve training standards in the hotel and catering industry.

Mr. Jackson: The employers in the hotel and catering industry are necessarily in the lead in ensuring that the industry's standards of training are adequate to meet their business needs. From February of this year, the industry has had an independent, employer-led industry training organisation—the Hotel and Catering Training Company. I am confident that the work of that body will raise the standards of training in the industry.

Mr. French: Many hotels that purport to offer three, four or five-star service are failing to employ adequately trained staff to fulfil certain basic functions, such as porters to carry bags, waiters to carry food and banqueting staff with an understanding of banqueting. Will my hon. Friend ensure that national vocational qualifications in the United Kingdom produce staff of comparable or better quality than those being produced in the catering industries of Germany and France?

Mr. Jackson: I hope that my hon. Friend has not had an unfortunate experience. It sounds as though there might be some personal background to his remarks. The Government's responsibility does not extend as far as my hon. Friend wants. We are responsible for the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, which has developed a vocational standard called Caterbase. It is a good standard, which has been developed and widely taken up.

May I make a practical suggestion? My hon. Friend is fortunate in having, as a member of his local Gloucestershire TEC, Mrs. Sam Elliott, who is the proprietor of the Grapevine hotel in Stow-on-the-Wold. She won a national training award last year and she is also a member of the national training task force. I suggest that my hon. Friend has a word with her.

Tourism

3. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met the chairman of the National Trust to discuss tourism.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): My right hon. and learned Friend has not met the newly appointed chairman of the National Trust to discuss tourism. He has, however, met the trust's director general in the context of the tourism and environment initiative mounted by my Department and the English tourist board.

Mr. Fearn: Is the Minister aware that this year the National Trust, with its parks, gardens and houses, has given the tourist industry one of the biggest boosts that it has ever had? As the National Trust's conservation and maintenance costs have risen and its agricultural revenue and Government grant have fallen by £1 million, is there any help that the Government can give?

Mr. Forth: I would join the hon. Gentleman, as I am sure would every hon. Member, in his admiration and praise for the work that the National Trust does, has done in the past and will continue to do. As the hon. Gentleman no doubt knows, my colleagues in the Department of the Environment are funding the National Trust to the tune of some £800,000 in the current year. As with many other good causes, one could always make a case for more funding, but the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the real point, which is that the National Trust is perhaps

uniquely placed to raise a lot of revenue from those who support it and its activities. That it is doing and will continue to do, and I believe that that is the direction for the future.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate the National Trust on its important contribution to the recently published report on tourism and the environment? What steps do the Government intend to take to ensure that the many excellent recommendations in that report are put into practice in future?

Mr. Forth: Indeed, the National Trust played a key part in that exercise, of which my Department was rather proud, because we felt that we identified early on the creative tension which exists between environmental matters and the demands of tourism. In that report which was published on 1 May, we identified recommendations such as wider dissemination and application of visitor management techniques and a partnership approach well exemplifed by the role of the National Trust. As my hon. Friend would expect, we shall be carrying that forward in order to ensure that the jobs and benefits of tourism do not run counter to the requirements of the environment.

Mr. Skinner: Have the 70 paintings and the 22 pieces of silver that finished up at No. 10 Downing street when the previous Prime Minister was in office, many of which were taken from National Trust homes, now been restored to their rightful places? If not, it is high time they were.

Mr. Forth: For a moment, I thought that the hon. Gentleman was harking back to the days of the Greater London council when he spoke about the missing silver, but in fact the hon. Gentleman was reminding the House of the respect and regard my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) has for the national heritage and the fact that, as one would have expected, she was keen to ensure that our national heritage was well represented at No. 10 Downing street. Anyone who believed otherwise could only be in the same carping mode as I am afraid we find the hon. Gentleman.

Picketing

5. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received in the last 12 months on picketing.

Mr. Forth: Some half a dozen such representations on picketing have been received. I believe that one reason why that number is so small is the success of our legislation in bringing to an end the violent and intimidatory picketing which disfigured industrial relations in the 1970s. None of the representations has sought the legalisation of secondary picketing.

Mr. Arbuthnot: As my hon. Friend has had no representations about bringing back secondary picketing, one of the curses of the 1970s which ended in the winter of discontent, does he agree that it is appalling and horrifying that the Opposition want to re-legalise it?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an important point which I am sure the House and people beyond it will want to note, and that is that, given the staggering success of the industrial relations legislation that the Government have introduced in a careful and planned way, particularly the elimination of the evils of secondary picketing and its violence, the mere suggestion that Opposition Members might want secondary picketing to be brought back is so outrageous that I am sure that the electorate will take due note of that at the appropriate time.

Social Charter

6. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress towards the implementation of the social charter.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): The social charter signed by the 11 other member states was only declaratory and has no legal effect. The European Commission has to date published 21 legislative and other proposals under its social action programme. Of those, five have been agreed so far. The United Kingdom continues to play a full and active part in the discussions. For example, at yesterday's informal meeting of European Community Employment Ministers, I put forward a five-point initiative designed to increase effective employee involvement, including a European Community recommendation on best practice. There was useful discussion of that issue, and it was agreed that consideration of my proposal should continue in the months ahead.

Mr. Banks: It is obvious that the Secretary of State is speaking and acting far more moderately, in this post-Finchley age, in respect of the social charter. Does he accept the importance of the social dimension as a factor in the Single European Act? Will he persuade the Council of Ministers and the Commission to become actively involved in renegotiating the Council of Europe's social charter, and the Commission to accede to the Council of Europe's charter—to which our country is a major signatory?

Mr. Howard: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to allay his anxieties. There has been no change whatsoever in the attitude adopted by the United Kingdom Government in the Social Affairs Council of Ministers during the whole of the period in which I have had the honour to represent this country at that Council. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the importance of the social dimension of the Single European Act programme. Its most important aspect, bearing in mind the fact that 15·5 million people are without jobs in the Community, is the creation of employment. My main task at the Council of Ministers is to do all I can to ensure that the Community does nothing to place extra burdens on British employers, which would destroy jobs in this country and in other Community states.

Mr. Grylls: Will my right hon. and learned Friend be wary of any proposals from the Social Affairs Council of Ministers, which seems to be caught in a 1960s time warp in believing that its policies would help to create jobs, when the reverse is true—they would help to destroy them? Will my right hon. and learned Friend be particularly careful about any further bureaucractic proposals from the Commission affecting temporary or part-time workers? If they are tied up in more red tape, there will be fewer and fewer jobs for them.

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree, and I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the proposed directive relating to

part-time work was not even discussed at yesterday's informal meeting of the Council. I shall continue to keep uppermost in my representations to the Council the need to encourage and enhance employment, reduce regulation, and avoid damaging measures that would increase the number of unemployed in the Community.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the Secretary of State confirm that among the Government's reasons for opposing the social charter is that it would necessitate freedom of association—in other words, because people would be allowed to join the trade union of their choice? That would force the Government to reconsider their decision not only to destroy jobs at GCHQ but to undermine the civil liberties of those who worked there and who were sacked for the crime of joining a trade union. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman further confirm that the Government have already acknowledged that right by international treaty, through their support of International Labour Organisation conventions and of the United Nations declaration on human rights? How does the Secretary of State intend to respond to the latest criticism made by ILO experts that Britain is again in the wrong in its attitude to the social charter? Will he now allow the people employed at GCHQ to become members of a free trade union?

Mr. Howard: I am absolutely astonished that the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party should have the gall to come to the House and talk about restrictions on people joining the trade unions of their choice. What is the hon. Gentleman's attitude, and that of the Labour party, to the Bridlington agreement? How dare the hon. Gentleman come to the House and pretend, with his party, to be the protector of people wishing to join the trade union of their choice?

Older Workers

7. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many men and women in the labour force are aged 55 years and over.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated from the preliminary results of the 1990 labour force survey that, in the spring of that year, there were 2,168,000 men and 1,289,000 women in the labour force aged 55 and over.

Mr. Cran: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is disgraceful that a considerable number of companies still practise age discrimination and consequently turn their backs on a not inconsiderable pool of talented labour who happen to be over 55 years of age? Does he also agree that employment should principally be on the basis of merit and nothing else? If so, what is he doing to encourage companies to change their minds and to clean up their employment practices?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Companies should eschew such unnecessary discrimination. The Government seize every opportunity to argue that, and I have made several speeches on the issue. My hon. Friend might have been thinking about a Bill that has been drafted which suggests that there should be legislation on the issue, but we do not believe that legislation would help, for the practical reason that there are circumstances—a limited number, admittedly—in which the age of a person may be relevant to the job. It would be impossible to write all those exceptions into a statute, which is why we do not believe that legislation would be the right approach. Persuasion, not compulsion, is the right approach and we shall continue to do all that we can to persuade.

Mr. Bermingham: But does the Minister agree that the period from 1980-91 has shown that, for people of 50 years of age and over who have been made redundant or otherwise put out of work, it is increasingly difficult to find re-employment? Does he also agree that that is a disgraceful waste of talent, experience and other knowledge? Will he take positive steps for once to stop the bleeding of and drain on our national resources caused by the under-employment of the over 50s?

Mr. Jackson: I said that we agreed that there is a drain. The hon. Gentleman has to set the circumstances against the background: about 3 million more people are employed in Britain now than was the case a decade ago, but it is true that there has been a slight decline in the proportion of the labour force aged over 55. Whether the cause is as the hon. Gentleman said or whether it is because of the increased personal income and wealth which enables more people to retire earlier is a question to which we do not have the answer. The hon. Gentleman is right that we should be concerned, but we can agree that there would be practical difficulties in the way of legislation.

Mr. Rowe: Let me assure my hon. Friend that a substantial number of people aged 55 and over are finding it unreasonably difficult even to get an interview for a job. Given the manifest fact that many people in that age group have experience, loyalty and skills which are superior to those of much younger people, will he do his level best to ensure that he keeps those of his colleagues who are also in that age group in their jobs by making it clear to employers that they should take a favourable view of people of that age?

Mr. Jackson: The Government employ many such people in the civil service, but we do not employ such practices. The issue must be dealt with in the relationship between the employer and the employee. The Government can urge, explain and argue, and can draw the attention of employers to the facts to which my hon. Friend refers, but it must be a matter between the employer and the employee. We do not believe that legislation would help.

Mr. McLeish: Is the Minister aware that a large proportion of men and women over 50 in the labour force are unemployed? Why then, last year, did about 500,000 people join the dole queue? Why has his Department administered the most savage cuts in training since the war? Why is he not now going to the Treasury to demand more money for the unemployed? Is it because the Government do not care about unemployment?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the level of unemployment is essentially decided as a consequence of the wage settlements reached in negotiations between employers and employees. The Government have repeatedly pointed out that the trend of wage settlements has been too high overall to be afforded in the light of the increase in productivity. It would be

useful if the hon. Gentleman were to join us in arguing that case rather than attempting to pin the blame where it cannot be pinned.

Manufacturing Industry

8. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he proposes to improve manufacturing employment in the Bolton/Bury travel-to-work area.

Mr. Howard: The employment service and the Bolton and Bury training and enterprise council operate a wide range of services and programmes to help improve the employment prospects for unemployed people in the area. It is employers who create jobs, whether it is in the manufacturing sector or other sectors of the economy.

Mr. Lewis: The Secretary of State will not be surprised to know that I think that that was, as usual, a bogus answer. Does he not realise that since 1979, 1,000 manufacturing jobs a year have been lost in the Bolton-Bury travel-to-work area, which includes my constituency? Does he not realise that the jobs that have been created, which are part time and low paid, such as stacking shelves in supermarkets, are no way to treat the cradle of the industrial revolution?

Mr. Howard: Why is the hon. Gentleman so determined to paint his area in the darkest possible light? Why does he not talk instead about the reduction in unemployment of 41 per cent. since July 1986? Why does he not talk about the almost 2,500 young people who are receiving training in the Bolton and Bury area, almost 80 per cent. of them qualifying or receiving further training after they have completed their youth training? Why does he not talk about the 500 people in his area who currently benefit from the enterprise allowance? Why does he not talk about the £4 million that is spent through the urban programme in his area, or about the £19 million that has been spent through regional selective assistance since 1979? Why does he not tell the world the good news about his area, instead of darkening its image in such a damaging way?

Oil Well Fires

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice the Health and Safety Executive has given about fire-fighting training in relation to oil wells.

Mr. Forth: Before 1 April 1991, the executive was responsible only for health and safety at onshore oil and gas drilling operations. Since that date, the executive has also taken on regulatory responsibility for health and safety of offshore oil and gas installations.

No specific advice regarding training for fighting oil well fires has been given. It is the responsibility of operators of oil and gas operations to ensure that the work force are given the appropriate level of training to enable them to use safely and effectively the fire-fighting equipment provided.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Minister undertake to write me a detailed letter about the advice that the Health and Safety Executive is giving to the British Army medical team working out of Ahmadi hospital in Kuwait and to the 700 Royal Engineers who are working in appalling conditions of hydrogen sulphide and of photochemical smog where, without being alarmist, there is a real danger of carcinogenic results?

Mr. Forth: I fully understand the nature of the hon. Gentleman's question. From the Dispatch Box, I should normally be only too delighted to undertake to write him the detailed letter than he invites. In this circumstance, I should, before I gave that undertaking, have to establish that it is for the Health and Safety Executive to be involved in the matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I undertake to look at that most carefully and to establish whether it is the responsibility of the Executive and of my Department, or whether the responsibility that the hon. Gentleman has raised lies elsewhere, in which case I should advise him of that matter.

Mr. Devlin: Why does the Health and Safety Executive have to advise oil platform operators of its intent to visit? Why should not it be allowed merely to conduct a random spot check, unannounced, as it would do on land? Surely that would be better for the offshore industry.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend raises an important and interesting point. This is a matter such as we shall examine when the Health and Safety Executive develops its new responsibilities for the offshore oil industry. I will take up the very point that my hon. Friend has made as we develop the new regulations and as we identify the best way in which we can guarante the same level of health and safety offshore as we have come to expect onshore.

Manufacturing Industry (Redundancies)

12. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of redundancies in the last year were in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Howard: During the 12 months to January 1991, 65 per cent. of all confirmed redundancies were in manufacturing industries.

Ms. Armstrong: Does not this signal a very dire state for the British economy and for the future of British industry? In the early 1980s, we were told that manufacturing industry was being sorted out so that it would be ready to compete with the rest of Europe. Now the Minister tells us of major cuts in employment. It is also true that there has been a £7 billion downturn in manufacturing output since last March. What are the Government going to do to support employment of the highest calibre in manufacturing industry and to give this country a chance?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady overlooks a significant difference. It is that while manufacturing employment fell during the lifetime of the Labour Government, as it has during the lifetime of the present Government, manufacturing output fell during the Labour Government while it has risen during this Government. That is the best possible tribute to the effectiveness of the Government's policies.

Mr. McCrindle: In contrast to what the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) said, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that during this recession, unlike previous periods of economic downturn, the proportion of redundancies in white-collar jobs has risen considerably? Has my right hon. and learned Friend

any thoughts on when he would expect an upturn in the service industries? What message would he wish me to give my constituents, who are suffering quite considerably?

Mr. Howard: I refer my hon. Friend to the survey that has been published by the Institute of Directors. The results show a remarkable turnround in the confidence of its members and provides extremely encouraging evidence that the turnround will come soon. I am sure that my hon. Friend will share my view that the most damaging thing that could happen to employment prospects would be the imposition of a national minimum wage, which would destroy up to 2 million jobs. If the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) rises on this question, I hope that he will explain to the House how he would avoid the consequence that as the minimum wage is increased as a proportion of the average wage, the average wage in turn increases and we embark on a never-ending cycle of job destruction.

Mr. Blair: With unemployment increasing faster than in any other country in the western world, and when the summer will inevitably see a further round of closures, cuts and redundancies, when will the Secretary of State fight for his Department's budget? The money that is spent on training the unemployed is, in real terms, half what was spent when unemployment was last at 2 million. Or is it simply the case that the unemployed have become the forgotten people of this Government?

Mr. Howard: What a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not take the opportunity to answer the question that I put to him. Perhaps he thought that it was a sort of warm-up question that he was not obliged to answer. The hon. Gentleman put a statistic in his question—he has used it repeatedly in recent days—on my Department's budget. It is entirely untrue and entirely unfounded. I challenge him to produce the figures on which the assertion is based. We are producing a range of measures to help the unemployed back into work which is wider than that which has ever existed.

Tourism (Northumberland)

13. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the chairman of the Northumbria tourist board to discuss the further development of tourism in Northumberland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My noble Friend Viscount Ullswater, who has ministerial responsibility for tourism matters within my Department, will meet officers and members of the Northumbria tourist board on 14 May. I welcome the board's new five-year strategy and the increased participation in its work by the private sector, which should assist the development of tourism in the region.

Mr. Amos: I am pleased to hear about the meeting on 14 May. As Northumberland is the most beautiful of counties, can my hon. Friend give more details of the measures that he is taking to make the promotion of tourism in Northumberland more effective both within the United Kingdom and overseas?

Mr. Forth: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has taken the opportunity to praise the area which he represents. It is something that Conservative Members do whenever the opportunity arises and which Opposition Members signally fail to do. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the many measures that are being taken, including the recent changes to the tourist board's constitution and the setting up of a commercial members group, both of which are positive and welcome steps. Many other measures are being taken. The key to them—this illustrates the forward-looking and positive nature of the board—is the way in which it is working with the English tourist board, with local commercial interests and with local authorities to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach in praising the very aspects of the region to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention.. That is the way forward. I wish that many other tourist boards would follow the example of the Northumbria tourist board.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister accept that tourism is important to the economy of rural Northumberland? Does he recognise that the removal of section 4 grants has weakened the ability of the industry to invest and that the 10·9 per cent. increase in the uniform business rate is hitting many small businesses in the tourist trade quite hard?

Mr. Forth: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. The opening of the £20 million Copthorne hotel and the £7 million Novotel in Newcastle in 1990—to take just two examples from the hon. Gentleman's region—illustrate the general point that the inducements that were available under section 4 were not necessary to allow investment to be sustained. It is possible and likely that up and down the country we shall see a continued level of investment without the inducements that section 4 offered.

Special Needs Training

14. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on youth training for young people with special needs.

Mr. Jackson: All young people under 18 who are not in full-time education or employment are guaranteed the offer of a suitable training place. This includes those who have special training needs. Training and enterprise councils are required to set out in their plans how they intend to meet this guarantee. My Department monitors delivery of these plans and has produced guidance to help TECs with training for people with special needs.

Mr. Smith: If that is the case, why are centres, schemes and places which provide such training being closed throughout Britain? Schemes being closed include the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders scheme which served my constituency and, indeed, the Minister's constituency. Is not it utterly repugnant that youngsters with special needs should pay the price of government cuts in training? Is not it time that the Minister not only mouthed the guarantee but acted on it so that all youngsters had real entitlement to quality training appropriate to their needs?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman is confusing the network of providers with the position of individual people. The hon. Gentleman and his party are in no position to lecture us about training young people. When the Labour party was last in office, it provided a training

programme on which there were only 6,000 places. The Government now provide, through youth training, some 350,000 places for young people.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will my hon. Friend join me in praising the work of the Elfrida Rathbone Society in dealing with special needs? Does he agree that, as at least some of the people involved are receiving training in life skills rather than training directed at the labour market, it would be more appropriate if such training were dealt with not by the Department of Employment but by the Department of Health or the Department of Social Security?

Mr. Jackson: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the Elfrida Rathbone Society. I know something of its excellent work. My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about the division of responsibility between the Departments. Clearly, there is a difficult interface between training for employment in the labour market and training which is intended to help people to continue their lives. My hon. Friend is right that we should keep the matter under review, but meanwhile we have a responsibility. Through our arrangements and our contracts with the training and enterprise councils, we are in a position to discharge that responsibility.

Mr. Leighton: Is not it the case that young people with special needs in the London borough of Newham and Essex have few opportunities because, as the *Newham Recorder* has reported, the youth training guarantee is not being honoured and hundreds of young people are leaving school without a job or a YT place? What is the Minister's explanation for that disgraceful situation? What action will he take to rectify it?

Mr. Jackson: Unusually, the hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. Some concern was expressed about the ability of Essex training and enterprise council to fulfil the guarantee. We investigated the matter and took appropriate action. Among other things, the TECs are contracted to deliver the guarantee; they are funded accordingly and will deliver the guarantee.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my hon. Friend accept that the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) is widely shared? Such people may fall between two stools and benefit more socially than industrially. Is there any basis for recent press reports that the possibility of reviving the community programme is being studied?

Mr. Jackson: I promise my hon. Friend that, according to the boundaries mentioned in an earlier question, we shall keep the position under review. The Government are always reviewing the options open to them in the labour market, but we have no plans to introduce a temporary work scheme *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen to Employment questions.

Mr. Fatchett: Does not the Minister realise how complacent and out of touch his answers sound? Up and down the country, those who are involved in running training and enterprise councils and voluntary organisations say that because of the cuts in the Department's training budget more and more young people with special needs are experiencing difficulty in obtaining a place on a training course. Is not it typical of the Government that they put at risk the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in our society?

Mr. Jackson: This is another one of the Labour party's cuts. Expenditure on youth training has increased by £38 million this year.

Trade Union Certification Officer

17. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the work of the trade union certification officer.

Mr. Forth: The Certification Officer for Trade Unions and Employer Associations is an independent authority appointed under statute. He has a number of functions, which include ensuring that trade unions keep proper accounts, ensuring observance of the law on union mergers, reimbursing certain costs of unions' postal ballots and dealing with complaints about union executive elections and membership registers. Copies of the certification officer's annual report for 1990, which was published on 16 April, are available in the Library.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the certification officer's workload should be lightened by following the best practice in Europe, as advocated by the Labour party, and banning contributions from trade unions to political parties? Does he agree that the certification officer needs more staff to ensure that the fiasco that took place in the union that sponsors the Leader of the Opposition does not take place again?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend, typically, shows a close interest in and care for the work of the certification officer and I am glad that he has brought it to the attention of the House. May I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the certification officer and to assure my hon. Friend that, as in many other matters of industrial relations legislation, we shall keep this under the closest possible review? When evidence shows the need for action, we shall not hesitate to take it.

Women Part-time Employees

18. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide details of the number of women in part-time employment; and what is the average level of wages.

Mr. Jackson: There were 5,146,000 women in part-time employment in Great Britain in December 1990. The 1990 new earnings survey estimated that the average gross hourly part-time earnings of women were £3·95.

Mrs. Ewing: The Under-Secretary will recall that answers given to the House on 15 March showed that almost 250,000 women in Scotland were in part-time employment, which meant that their earnings were under the European threshold of decency, and that almost 8,000 of them were earning less than £2 per hour. What steps will the Government take to ensure that companies are prosecuted if they are found to be illegally underpaying women in part-time employment? Only two companies have been prosecuted in the past decade.

Mr. Jackson: If anyone is in breach of the law, he should be pursued and prosecuted. I shall happily look

into the point that the hon. Lady made. I do not know whether the Scottish National party supports a minimum wage, but she must understand that its consequences would be certainly to destroy jobs and to withdraw jobs that would otherwise be available to women.

Training Credits

19. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the training credits pilots.

Mr. Howard: All 11 pilot schemes for training credits commenced on time on 1 April. Young school leavers in pilot areas are now receiving training credits and starting to use them to obtain approved training of their choice.

Mr. Mitchell: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that training credits are already popular with young people because they extend choice and opportunity in the type of training which young people undertake? Does he agree that training credits are a great deal more popular than the Labour party's out-of-date and outmoded policies which rely on compulsion for their implementation?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The right way forward is to put buying power directly into the hands of these young people. Our pilot schemes, all of which commenced on time, are proving the success of that approach.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. Immediately after Questions I shall depart the House to attend a guard of honour for the Prime Minister of Spain. I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. McAllion: In the past week we have heard some Scottish Tories describe Scottish devolution as an immovable force which their party ignores at its risk. Other Scottish Tories have described it as a fantasy and a dead duck and yet others have described it as a London-based plot hatched by the chairman of the Conservative party to win cheap votes in Scotland. With which of those views does the Prime Minister agree—or is this yet another important issue on which he does not know his own mind?

The Prime Minister: Scotland is part of the United Kingdom and will remain fully so.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that during the past 12 years this country has gained tremendous advantages through substantial reductions in income tax levels? Does he further agree that to increase income tax rates again, even for those on moderate levels of earnings, such as classroom teachers in London, would be a retrograde step and a major blow to the aspirations of millions of people and to economic output?

The Prime Minister: I certainly would agree with my hon. Friend about that. It applies also to national insurance contributions, because what matters is the net disposable income that people have left in their pockets to spend. People will have noticed the Opposition's plans in that regard.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity publicly to oppose a two-tier system in hospitals, such as Watford general hospital, where the patients of non budget-holding general practitioners must wait longer and take second place, regardless of their clinical need?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. Operations are done on the basis of clinical need. There will be no reductions in existing operations in Watford. Instead, as a result of our reforms, some people will get operations faster than otherwise they would have done. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister has just confirmed the existence of a two-tier service. Does he realise that a two-tier system such as he supports is, as the British Medical Association says, "unethical"? Does he recognise that even in its existence it is a violation of the basic principle of the national health service that treatment must be determined according to clinical need, not contracts or commercial decisions? Is not it obvious from what he says and allows that although we believe in a national health service on the basis of need, the Prime Minister believes in one according to deals?

The Prime Minister: None of that remotely follows. Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman did not listen to my first answer. Operations are done on the basis of clinical need. I shall repeat that in case he did not fully hear it first time: operations are done on the basis of clinical need. What we are seeking and attaining are a more efficient system and more efficient use of the large resources in the NHS. The right hon. Gentleman's plans would take money away from the NHS as a result of many of his spiteful proposals. He has made it clear that he will provide no extra funding. We need no lectures on health care from him.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister not only misrepresents me, he misrepresents what is going on—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister misrepresents what is going on now. Will he take this opportunity to say that there are no cases that he will allow in which the patients of non budget-holding GPs will be allowed to take second place to the patients of budget-holding GPs who have made contractual arrangements with hospitals to gain preference for their patients?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should read what I have said twice already: that operations are done on the basis of clinical need.

Mr. Alexander: Does my right hon. Friend recollect his past criticism of the unsatisfactory nature of the laws on Sunday trading? In the light of recent events, does he agree that it might now be appropriate to bring our laws in England and Wales into line with those of Scotland, where

the commitment to the Sabbath and keeping Sunday special goes hand in hand with sensible Sunday trading laws?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, a number of cases are being considered by the courts. Some may go to appeal. However, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office is consulting interested parties to see whether a consensus can be found on Sunday trading law that would be acceptable both to them and to the House, which has repeatedly expressed a view on the matter. I believe that that is the right way ahead on a matter of conscience such as this. Experience in Scotland suggests that a suitable consensus is possible. I hope that we can find one south of the border.

Q2. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Ruddock: Does the Prime Minister know that last year in Lewisham there were only 320 employment training places when there were 10,000 unemployed people? Can he tell me, therefore, why today, when unemployment has increased by a third, to over 14,000, the number of employment training places is to be cut by a third? What faith does he expect the British people to put in his commitment to a fairer society?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady will know, the United Kingdom is the only country in Europe to guarantee a training place to everyone under the age of 18 who is not already in full-time education or employment. Spending on training is £2·7 billion this year. That is two and a half times more than was spent by the previous Labour Government.

Q3. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Speller: Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will fight for the interests of the small family farm in Britain at the common agricultural policy discussions that are to come and also by providing assistance for such items as expertise in marketing and help for farmers' incomes, which have fallen to an unacceptable level?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. We will defend the interests of all farmers, including small family farmers, in the forthcoming Community discussions. The House knows that, as currently framed, the Commission's plans for CAP reform would discriminate against United Kingdom farmers, largely because our average farm size is greater than that in other member states. We have given considerable help to small farmers recently, in particular by increasing milk quotas and by means of the hill livestock compensatory allowance. We shall continue to help.

Q4. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to repudiate the views of the Conservative candidate in the Monmouth by-election who yesterday advocated the opting out of not just the Royal Gwent hospital but the Nevill Hall hospital as well?

The Prime Minister: Opting out—that is to say, putting control in the hands of local people within the national health service—is the right way to produce better management and local choice. I note that the hon. Gentleman does not favour local choice, just as his hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made clear in terms of education yesterday.

Q5. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wilshire: Given the Government's desire to extend choice in education further, and given the public's desire to see the highest possible standards of education everywhere, will my right hon. Friend find time today to look for ways to extend further choice in education?

The Prime Minister: We are very pleased to see extended choice in education. The new grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges and open enrolment have provided considerable extra choice. I hope that parents will take advantage of it. It is clear that the Opposition do not like choice. Grant-maintained schools, CTCs, the assisted places scheme, charitable status for private schools and the existing A-levels would all go and, with the Opposition's tax plans, most of the teachers would go as well.

Q6. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Having clearly misled Parliament last week——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No hon. Member misleads Parliament. The hon. Member knows that and he must rephrase his question.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Having misrepresented to Parliament last week the attitude of the British Medical Association and Britain's doctors as to GP contracts, why did the Prime Minister seek to cover up his mistakes by doctoring *Hansard*? Is that not true and does not the Prime Minister owe someone an apology?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is wrong, and Mr. Speaker will make a statement about that matter at 3.30 pm. In advance of that statement, let me say this to the hon. Gentleman. Like every hon. Member, he knows that it is normal practice, when a Minister uses a quote, for the precise words and their source to be provided by *Hansard*. In this case, the name of the correct source was put into the record, but I am entirely happy for the original words to be reinstated. The magazine from which I quoted was *GP Magazine* but similar sentiments to those that I quoted, endorsing the reforms, have been expressed in the *British Medical Journal*, published by the BMA—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us hear the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I quote from a recent editorial in the *British Medical Journal*, which said:

"The reforms may not address all the problems of the NHS, but they do improve our capacity to specify the quality of services and to price improvements."

The point that I was making is entirely justified. If any apology is required, it is from the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

Q7. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arnold: Did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity, over the weekend, to reflect on the damage that would be done to our representative democracy by a system of proportional representation? This system would deprive people of their solely responsible local representative to satisfy the Liberals, the statisticians and the pundits who enjoy smoke-filled rooms.

The Prime Minister: I am not in favour of either smoke-filled rooms or proportional representation. I share my hon. Friend's view that it leaves minority parties determining Government policy and striking bargains for their support. That is not democracy, it is horse trading, and I will have no part in it.

Q9. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Paice: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to reflect on the fact that we, by reducing the top rate of tax to 40 per cent. from 83 per cent., have increased the proportion of total yield of income tax paid by the highest 10 per cent. of taxpayers from 20 to 30 per cent? Is not this because many of the most wealthy people are now staying in this country and bringing their money back, so that we get 40 per cent. of something, whereas the Opposition would get 59 per cent. of nothing?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. The evidence as to the amount of tax collected with lower rates is clear for all to see. It is equally clear that, under the Labour party's proposals, 14 out of 15 taxpayers would not be better off, as the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) said a year ago. The figure is now one in eight. When the shadow Chancellor gets at the figures they change daily, and when we have finished costing Labour's programme they will change again.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Prime Minister will be aware that, in relation to his policy on local government finance, only after huge public protest and widespread cuts in services did he decide that he had better review the policy inherited from his predecessor and then to ditch it. Does he agree that his policy on the opting out of hospitals was equally widely opposed and that it is now clear that it, too, will result in widespread cuts in services? For the sake of consistency of principle, will the Prime Minister carry out a wholesale review and then ditch the policy?

The Prime Minister: No. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's views, and I do not believe that his analysis is remotely correct. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman must wait and see how it turns out. He will find that he is wrong. For many years we have had to ensure that the national health service uses its resources to the most efficient extent. At last the present Government have had the courage to introduce a system that will ensure that the money is used to best effect for patients. I believe that, for the national health service, that is the right way to proceed and the one which will produce the maximum amount of good patient care. That is what we propose to do.

Official Report

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have considered the complaint made on Friday last by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that the *Official Report* incorrectly reported part of an answer by the Prime Minister given by him on the previous day. The Prime Minister is reported, when referring to the British Medical Association, as having quoted from the *GP Magazine*. I have checked the transcript, which shows that what the Prime Minister said was:

"and, only last year, it opposed the GP contracts, yet, in its own magazine, it now says . . ."

It is the normal practice for a Minister's staff to check *Hansard*, and during this process a sub-editor was given by a member of the Prime Minister's staff the name of the magazine quoted by the Prime Minister. The sub-editor thought that this was the British Medical Association's own magazine and accepted the suggested change. By including the name of the magazine, however, the *Official Report* inadvertently changed the sense of the Prime Minister's reply. The Editor of *Hansard* has expressed to me his regret that this should have happened, and a correction will be printed in today's *Official Report*.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I am grateful for your statement, Mr. Speaker. Of course we accept in good faith the explanation given by the Editor of *Hansard*. I am quite sure that everybody is clear that no blame attaches to the Editor or his staff for what occurred. However, the fact remains that, although the Prime Minister's staff do not read the court circular, and apparently do not read the *British Medical Journal*—[HON. MEMBERS: "Cheap."] It is certainly not as cheap as fiddling the record in *Hansard*. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It would be helpful to the whole House, in terms of lowering the temperature, if the hon. Gentleman were to rephrase his last comment.

Dr. Cunningham: What emerges from your inquiry, Mr. Speaker, is that a member of the Prime Minister's staff persuaded a *Hansard* sub-editor to change the record. *[Interruption.]* That is what happened. The sub-editor was persuaded to change the record in a way that was inaccurate in that it changed the sense of what the Prime Minister had said. Would it not have been better if a correction had been issued from No. 10 Downing street and apologies offered both to the House and to the British Medical Association?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that anything further arises on that. *[Interruption.]* Order. I have made my statement and cannot say more than that.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Member is always so supportive of the Chair, I will take a helpful comment from him.

Mr. Ewing: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for pointing out that I am always helpful to the Chair. It is precisely in that vein that I want to put my point of order. We are not dealing here with a trivial matter, and the last thing that I want to see is the Editor of *Hansard*, to whom no blame attaches, or even a member of the Prime Minister's staff, being incriminated. I want to know whether this was discussed with the Prime Minister and whether the change was made on his authority.

Bangladesh (Cyclone Disaster)

3.37 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I beg to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely, "the Bangladesh cyclone disaster." *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very important that I hear this application.

Mr. Shore: The whole House was appalled by the news last week that 50,000 men, women and children had perished in the cyclone that swept over the coastal areas and the low-lying islands of the bay of Bengal. Alas, that early estimate of the dead has already been proved to be wrong. More than 125,000 casualties are now reported and there are serious estimates that the total could rise to over 200,000 before the count is over. But even that is not the end of it. Villages throughout the coastal areas are still cut off, most of them without food or drinking water, and the first reports of cholera are coming in—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not need a point of order. I am listening to the application that is being made to me. *[Interruption.]* Order. It is very unseemly to have these comments. I ask the House please to settle down and let me hear this application.

Mr. Shore: The first reports of cholera are now coming in, and a further still more awful disaster is in the making. Clearly this is a specific and important matter which needs the most urgent consideration. In the very short term there is a great need for food and medicines and, just as important, the means of delivering them. What appear to be most required are helicopters and inflatable power boats.

The Government could tell the House very little last Thursday. I do not blame them for that; telephone contact with Bangladesh is largely dependent upon satellite communications, and the principal facility in the Chittagong area was damaged by the cyclone and is still out of action. Nevertheless, we have a much clearer picture now than we had last Thursday and it should be possible, in a debate, for the Government to give an informed account of the actions they have taken so far, what is now in train, and what further assistance they propose to give.

This is also the time to consider what this country and other donors can do in the period ahead to assist the Government of Bangladesh to carry through an enhanced programme for building cyclone shelters and strengthening coastal defences against, certainly, future cyclone attacks.

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. Apart from loss of human lives, present estimates of the cost of this disaster in terms of cattle, crops and infrastructure are well over $1,000 million. Bangladesh is

a member of the Commonwealth. Our ties with that country and its people over the past three decades have been strengthened by the substantial number of people of Bangladeshi origin who have settled here and are now among our fellow citizens.

These are strong reasons for an emergency debate, and I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will grant one.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely, "the Bangladesh cyclone disaster."

As the House knows, I have to announce my decision without giving reasons. I listened with care and deep concern to what the right hon. Gentleman said. As he knows, I have to decide whether this application comes within the Standing Order, and, if so, whether a debate should be given priority over the business already set down for today or for tomorrow.

I listened with care to what the right hon. Gentleman said. I do not in any way underestimate its importance, but I have to say that in this case the matter raised does not meet the criteria of the Standing Order. I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to refer back to the statement that you made——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already dealt with that.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I very much regret that you were unable to accept the application of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). I regret also the rowdy atmosphere in which initially the application had to be made.

The Prime Minister, the Minister for Overseas Development and the Chief Secretary to the Secretary were all present. We understand the plight of the people of Bangladesh which has touched the hearts and, I am glad to say, the hands of the British people who are giving generously and who are concerned at the fact that our Government are being seen as one of the meanest of the richest nations in the world.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make allegations which I cannot answer. He is raising a point of order.

Mr. Madden: If the Minister for Overseas Development, the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary were to intimate to you, Mr. Speaker, a wish to make a statement at 7 o'clock this evening, would you facilitate such a statement, bearing in mind the great concern of many Bangladeshis who are British citizens and who are worried about the fate of their relatives and friends?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Let me deal with one thing at a time. I in no way underestimate the matter. Like the hon. Member, I also have constituents who have relatives in Bangladesh. We had a long run on it on a private notice question on Thursday. Every hon. Member who is present was called to put a question. I am sure that there will be other opportunities. I have to take into account all kinds of other criteria in making my decision. The House knows that.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House is here and is listening to the exchanges. I understand your reasons, Mr. Speaker, for not granting an emergency debate, regrettable though that decision is. Given the scale of the tragedy, surely we can prevail upon the Leader of the House to say that he will find an early opportunity for a debate, or discuss through the usual channels the rearrangement of business so that the House may have an opportunity to debate the tragedy and Britain's contribution towards reparation.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may be helpful to the House if I say that clearly we would wish to do that and to keep the House fully informed. Communication is obviously a problem in the area, but I can give the assurance that we wish to keep the House fully informed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that anything further on that can be raised with me. The Leader of the House, on behalf of the Government, has stated that he will bear the matter in mind. What point of order can arise for me out of that?

Points of Order

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State for Scotland has been briefing the press all morning about the fact that he intends to cap the expenditure of Lothian regional council, a step that may cost hundreds of jobs and will almost certainly put an end to the concessionary bus pass scheme enjoyed by pensioners.

In the past, Mr. Speaker, you have criticised Ministers who have chosen to make statements outside the House rather than to elected Members. Have you received a request for a statement to be made which at the very least would allow us to ask the Secretary of State why poll tax payers in Westminster get a blanket subsidy of £1,000 a head while in Lothian we get £453 a head? The whole thing seems to have the stench of electioneering. The purpose seems to be to save the skin of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who would otherwise face a very unhappy party conference in Perth tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me. I am sure that what has been said will have been heard.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If I may, I should like to revert to the statement that you made earlier about *Hansard*. It was quite clear from your statement that the name of a book or a magazine was added to the *Hansard* report by a member of the Prime Minister's office, who had not referred to the Prime Minister and had assumed that that was the magazine to which the Prime Minister had referred. You also made it clear that the Editor of *Hansard* admitted that in making that alteration his staff had altered the sense of the answer——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I did not say that.

Sir Hugh Rossi: The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) accused the Prime Minister of fiddling the report——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not sure that this is terribly helpful. I asked the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to withdraw his remark, and he did so.

Sir Hugh Rossi: The point is that the hon. Member for Copeland made that statement in the full hearing of the House, which asked him to withdraw. He steadfastly ignored that request. My question to you, Mr. Speaker, is whether it is appropriate that the hon. Gentleman should withdraw, and will you invite him to do so?

Mr. Speaker: I asked the hon. Member for Copeland to rephrase his remark, and I thought that he had done so —[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am quite certain that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to accuse anyone, least of all the Prime Minister, of fiddling. If he would like to make that clear, we can get on—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] Order. I ask hon. Members to restrain themselves; this is very bad behaviour. I shall repeat what I have just said to the hon. Member for Copeland—*[Interruption.]* Order. In the exchanges, which were somewhat excited, and amid a great deal of noise, I asked the hon. Member for Copeland to withdraw the charge that the Prime Minister had fiddled *Hansard*. I thought that he had done so. So that it can be absolutely clear, I ask the hon. Gentleman to do so now.

Dr. Cunningham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I did not accuse the Prime Minister of fiddling *Hansard*—[HON. MEMBERS: "You did."] We must get this absolutely clear. I was making it clear that what had happened was that a member of the Prime Minister's No. 10 staff had secured a change in the record, which changed the sense. Conservative Members started to shout comments at me, including "Cheap", to which I replied, "Not half as cheap as fiddling the record." That is what I said, and I stand by that statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we had better leave the matter there.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that this will be a helpful point of order. To avoid the problem occurring again, and as we already have an electronic *Hansard*—as it is called these days—should not a simple play-back facility be installed in the *Hansard* office? If a member of the Prime Minister's staff or anyone else then said to the *Hansard* staff, "We did not mean to say what we actually said"—the right hon. Gentleman is rapidly becoming the Dan Quayle of British politics—would not the simple answer be, as in the case of a disputed penalty, to have an action replay to decide who is right?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Skinner: You need a linesman to help you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need that sort of help.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. I am perfectly able to deal with these matters.

It has been consistently ruled by my predecessors that tape recordings are not a check on the *Official Report*. The *Official Report* is a full report which,

"though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report, with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which on the other hand leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument."

Reference to that will be found in "Erskine May" on page 211.

The change made on Thursday does not fall within the category of acceptable correction. On the other hand, if *Hansard* was not able to correct our grammar and omit our verbal mistakes, it would, on many occasions, make pretty incomprehensible reading.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Would you, Mr. Speaker, agree with me —[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]

Mr. Speaker: Not on a point of order that I have not heard.

Mr. Dickens: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. *Hansard* has a difficult job. There cannot be an hon. Member in the House who has not had his or her speech tidied up because it was rather ambiguous. That is why we are all sent notes after our speeches and sometimes after our questions. In doing its work, *Hansard* often has to interpret ambiguous statements so as to make sensible reading for those who follow us. By all this stupidity this afternoon, are we not placing *Hansard* itself in a stupid position?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has stated in rather more detailed language the point that I was seeking to make.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to your decision on the application made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) for an emergency debate on the situation in Bangladesh, I realise that it is not acceptable to challenge the reasons behind your decision that the Finance Bill, today and tomorrow, must take precedence over such a debate, but may I say, in the presence of the Leader of the House, that, were reports in this morning's tabloid press to prove accurate and the Leader of the House does intend to announce the early rise of the House on 19 July, two weeks earlier than usual, many people would not understand how your office could be given the impression that Government business was of such urgency that that important debate could not be arranged?

Mr. Speaker: I have not heard that happy piece of news, but the hon. Gentleman will have heard what the Leader of the House said about the matter.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which arises from the Order Paper rather than from the *Official Report*. I think, Mr. Speaker, that you accept some responsibility for the Order Paper.

Question 260, tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), who clearly does not represent a Lothian constituency, facilitates an announcement by the Secretary of State which will amount to a savage attack on services provided by Lothian regional

council. May we be protected from such behaviour? Is not the Secretary of State prepared to come here and make a statement?

Mr. Speaker: I am responsible for the Order Paper. I look carefully at questions, and provided that they are in order they can be tabled, and that question was perfectly in order.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Further to your statement, Mr. Speaker, and the response of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), it is clear that he used the word "fiddling" and, sitting where we were on the Conservative Benches, it was abundantly evident that the hon. Gentleman's remarks were pointed directly at my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister; there can be no doubt about that. Taken out of context and read simply in *Hansard*, his words can mean all kinds of things, but at the time they were directed directly at my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Is the hon. Gentleman going to withdraw them?

Mr. Speaker: We have all heard what the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) subsequently said. The point was drawn to my attention by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). I have dealt with that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Although you have ruled on the application by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), as the Leader of the House is present in the Chamber, may I point out that, although we shall be considering the Finance Bill today and tomorrow, the Bill to be considered on Thursday is of lesser importance. I wonder whether the Leader of the House can find a way of facilitating a debate on Bangladesh on Thursday if an application for one, with the consent of all parties, is made to you tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. Would that be in order, and would you accept such an application?

Mr. Speaker: The Opposition and the minority parties have their Opposition days, although there may not be one immediately available for the hon. Member's party. Nevertheless, that question is clearly one for the usual channels to resolve, and right hon. and hon. Members heard what the Leader of the House had to say on that issue.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will take one final point of order, if it is on the same subject.

Mr. Corbyn: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is. I do not want to challenge your ruling on the application made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), but I want to convey to Ministers—through you, Mr. Speaker—the sense of urgency that must be brought to bear on the situation in Bangladesh. Hundreds of thousands of lives are at risk. Many of them could be saved, and a cholera epidemic in Bangladesh could be prevented, if transport equipment, particularly military helicopters, were sent to the affected region from the base at Diego Garcia and from bases in the Gulf. Urgency is the key. If the Minister concerned could be persuaded to make a statement today, or, better still, if helicopters could get to the region quickly, many lives could be saved.

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That the Proposal for a draft Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 published on 28th February 1991, being a Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Financial Services Act 1986 (Extension of Scope of Act) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1104) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Financial Services Act 1986 (Delegation) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Sunday Trading (Video Shops) Bill

3.55 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to exempt video shops from the provisions of the Shops Act 1950.

Some months ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described the Shops Act 1950 as bizarre. The ban on the sale or renting of videos is a particular example of that much more general complaint. The 1950 Act was passed in a quite different era. The 1940s were a time of rationing and not of plenty, and the Shops Act 1950 was passed at a time when cinemas did not open on Sunday, professional sport never took place on Sunday, and most people did not have television—and those who did had the choice of only one channel, which broadcast for only four and a half hours.

The 1950 Act was passed at a time when no one had heard of videos, garden centres, or do-it-yourself superstores. Today, the situation has changed. In 1972, the House passed the Sunday Theatre Bill and Sunday Cinema Bill. Today, cinemas and provincial theatres can, and do, open on Sunday—and only last Sunday the Haymarket theatre opened for a performance of "Talking Heads", which repeated an earlier performance and raised money for charity.

Videos are surely part of the same entertainment industry as the theatre and cinema. Whereas television used to be broadcast for only four and a half hours on Sunday, today one can view 20 hours of BBC1 or BBC2; 24 hours of ITV; or 20 hours of Channel 4. That represents 84 hours of viewing choice on Sunday, compared with four and a half hours in 1950. Furthermore, if one is a subscriber to Sky Television, one can watch 24 hours of movies on either of two of its film channels.

Current law says that it is perfectly moral to see a film at a cinema, but wrong to watch the same film on a video at home. The law says that it is right and moral to watch television all day, but wrong to hire a video to view after church.

A further anomaly is the changing attitude to sport. As I said, in 1950 there was no professional sport on Sunday, but today the most popular games of cricket are those played in the Sunday league. It is not unknown either for the British climate to cause the Wimbledon finals to be played on Sunday.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Members of Parliament do not work on Sunday.

Mr. Marshall: Some of us work a seven-day week, even if that is not true of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

The law says that it is perfectly all right to watch golf, cricket, football or tennis on Sunday, but wrong to view a sporting video. Apparently, it is perfectly moral to watch Arsenal playing at Highbury on Sunday, but wrong to watch a video of the 1966 World Cup final. What giants they were—Peters, Hurst, Charlton, Stiles and Banks—yet one cannot enjoy watching them on Sunday in one's own home. That is nonsense.

One of the ironies is that the video industry is more closely regulated than the cinema or the theatre. Under the Video Recordings Act 1984 much stronger standards apply to the video industry than apply to the cinema to take account of the fact that videos are seen in the home, not outside. Another irony is that video shops are owned by small shopkeepers who operate legally selling newspapers, so why should not they also be allowed to hire out a video? Why should not small shopkeepers be free to serve the needs of their customers? Why should not individuals in that branch of the entertainment industry be treated in the same way as the rest of the entertainment industry?

The importance of videos can be seen by the fact that more than 25,000 people are employed in the video software industry. It is the largest visual entertainment media employer, employing 50 per cent. more people than ITV and 25 times as many as British Sky Broadcasting. Sunday trade is especially important to the video industry because 28 per cent. of video rentals take place on a Sunday. If obstacles are placed in the way of this industry, the viability of some shops will be affected and some individuals will have to close shop.

There are currently 110 prosecutions pending against the video industry. In Newham, Hartlepool, Kingston-upon-Hull and Scunthorpe the social problems are so light that the local authorities are prosecuting the video industry for renting out videos. What blessed places they are that they have nothing better on which to concentrate local authority time.

The judgment of the Court of Appeal in the B and Q and Wickes cases has created uncertainty about the future of the Sunday trading law and its enforcement. It will now be more difficult to resort to injunctions to enforce the law, but it will be possible to prosecute and the maximum fine for a prosecution is £1,000. To a large firm, £1,000 is no deterrent, but to a small video shop which rents out a few videos it is an important penalty which acts as a real deterrent.

People, not legislation, make Sunday a special day. The church will not be graced by having conscripts in the pew and those churches which thrive do so because they offer a positive message. Would Charles Wesley have needed the protection of the Shops Act 1950 to get people to hear a good Wesleyan sermon? We all wish Archbishop Carey well in the future. This year we have seen a new Archbishop of Canterbury inducted and we shall shortly see a new Chief Rabbi. The new Chief Rabbi has a congregation that is not protected by trading laws, but it honours the Sabbath rather better than the followers of Archbishop Carey honour the Sabbath.

A church that relies on the protection of the law to encourage people to come to its services will do less well than the Jewish faith does, not by relying on the protection of the law but by having a positive message for those who come to shul.

A law that is frequently broken by the 60,000 shops that open every Sunday and by the 2 million people who work every Sunday, and a law that is enforced intermittently and is riddled with inconsistencies brings the rule of law into disrepute. I invite the House to face reality and to support the Bill. The need for the reform of Sunday trading is widely accepted by the Consumers Association, by the majority of retailers and by the majority of people in this country, apart from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). The nonsense has been confirmed by the recent Court of Appeal judgment.

One local authority has said that the law is now unenforceable. The Keep Sunday Special campaign has said that it believes in the need for compromise. The Bill offers a compromise. It deals with small traders and

suggests that video shops should be put on a par with the rest of the entertainment industry. I ask the House to allow the Bill to be introduced so that the House can demonstrate that it believes in the need for compromise.

4.4 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I have a high regard for my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for all his good works. At the end of his speech, he said that we should face reality. I appeal to the House to face reality and to realise that it is nonsense for ourselves and for our democracy to try to pretend that we still have the power to do anything in the meantime about Sunday trading. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said that, because of the recent court judgment, there was some difficulty in moving an injunction. He should consult a lawyer because the lawyers in Southend will tell him that it is not only difficult, but impossible to move an injunction at present. The law has effectively been frozen because of the decision in the B and Q case which was based solely on a decision whether our Sunday trading laws were inconsistent with the treaty of Rome.

We know that a higher court will make its judgment next week. We know that the matter will then go to the European Court. Although we may pass laws on Sunday trading and on whether video shops, greengrocers' shops or any other shop should stay open or be closed on a Sunday, we shall be told what to do by the European Court in two years' time.

It may be nonsense to try to hold up the House in the good work that it wants to do, but I appeal to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South and to the House generally to stop pretending that we still have power that we do not have. It does not make the slightest difference whether the Bill is passed or rejected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South kindly mentioned Southend. I drove round on Sunday and saw that, rightly or wrongly, all the video shops were open. The law is in a state of total confusion. It has been suspended because of an action that our laws are inconsistent with the treaty of Rome. I do not know whether our laws are inconsistent with the treaty. The people who will tell us are the judges in the European Court who are appointed to do so. Once they make the decision, whether we pass 1,000 laws on Sunday trading or whether the trading standards inspectors rush round, those inspectors will have no power.

I do not know what the court will do. My hon. Friend does not know what the court will do and I am sure that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who follows these issues closely, does not know what the court will do. The plain fact is that, irrespective of what we decide today, we shall be told what to do in two years' time. Even if the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats decide differently, that is that.

In the House of Commons, we spend a great deal of time asking for inquiries into matters and asking the Government to give more priority to certain matters when the power has gone away. A point of order was raised today about a rumour that the House will rise two weeks early simply because we can no longer do the things that we used to do. The time has come for the House of Commons to face up to the threat to our democracy, to consider the implications and to decide what we should do, instead of going on a wild goose chase and saying that we want to change a law that has been suspended because of an action relating to the European Court.

In no sense of hostility to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South—and he is one of the most conscientious, hard-working, sincere and undoubtedly good Members of the House—I must say that I hope that he will not be taken away from reality by what he says. The reality is that our law has been suspended. The reality is that, irrespective of the views of Parliament, we shall be told what to do in two years' time. To try to pretend that matters are different is to run away from reality and from our respect for democracy. I hope that my hon. Friend will withdraw the Bill. If he does not, I hope that the House will reject it, not because we reject his ideas, but because we have to say, sadly, that his opinions are utterly irrelevant today. The European Court and not the democratic House of Commons will decide and will tell us what to do.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 38, Noes 71.

Division No. 135] **[4.08 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Buck, Sir Antony
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Dover, Den
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hayes, Jerry
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Oppenheim, Phillip
Price, Sir David
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Walters, Sir Dennis
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Teresa Gorman and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Foster, Derek
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harris, David
Haynes, Frank
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knapman, Roger
Latham, Michael
Lewis, Terry
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Roger
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*

Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Gavin
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Teddy Taylor and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Finance Bill

(Clauses 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 31 and 77 and Schedule 14)

Considered in Committee.

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Ordered,

That the order in which proceedings in Committee of the whole House on the Finance Bill are to be taken shall be Clause 22, Clause 77, Schedule 14, Clause 23, Clause 24, Clause 31, Clause 21 and Clause 14—*[Mr. Mellor.]*

Clause 22

RATE OF CORPORATION TAX FOR 1990

4.21 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 16, line 4, at end add—

'(1A) Where a company whose activities consist

(i) wholly or mainly in the manufacture of finished goods, partly finished goods or materials, and

(ii) of activities falling within such classes, groups or descriptions set out in the Standard Industrial Classification issued by the Central Statistical Office as may be prescribed by way of regulations made under this subsection

so elects in writing within two years of the end of an accounting period which includes the whole or any part of the financial year 1990, subsection (1) above and subsection (2) below of this section shall not apply to that company in relation to that accounting period; and where such an election is made, then, in relation to that company for that accounting period,

(a) the rate at which corporation tax is charged for the financial year 1990 shall be 34·01 per cent. (and not 35 per cent. as provided by section 19 of the Finance Act 1990)

(b) section 24(2)(a)(i) of the Capital Allowances Act 1990 shall have effect as if the percentage specified therein were the aggregate of 25 per cent. multiplied by A and 40 per cent. multiplied by B, where B represents the fraction of the accounting period comprised within the financial year 1990 and A represents the fraction of the accounting period not so comprised (if any), and

(c) the fraction mentioned in section 13(2) of the Taxes Act 1988 for the financial year 1990 shall be taken to be a fraction of which the numerator is one thousand eight hundred and two and the denominator is eighty thousand (and not one fortieth as provided by section 20 of the Finance Act 1990).'.

The amendment proposes to raise the assistance and support that should be given to British business, especially in the context of the proposals in the Finance Bill and of the general state of the economy.

I remind the House of some of the economic indicators: 500,000 jobs have been lost in the past 12 months, and the losses are accelerating; almost 25,000 firms failed last year —an increase of almost 77 per cent.—and it is predicted that about a further 25 per cent. are likely to fail in the coming year; and since last spring, £2 billion has been slashed from investment and there has been a substantial cut—perhaps as high as £7 billion—in manufacturing output since last March.

Against the background of those alarming results for our economy, we contend that the Government should be giving priority to manufacturing industry and manufacturing investment, primarily because the tradable sector is almost overwhelmingly the sector of the economy in which we earn our living in the world, as opposed to merely exchanging goods and services within our boundaries. There are some tradable services, but Britain's trade in manufactures is the essence of the way in which it earns its living.

When the serious balance of payments deficit began to emerge, Conservative Members, especially the former Chancellor—I cannot remember how many Chancellors we have had since—the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), sought to suggest that the problems were of demand and of the way in which the economy was developing rather than structural problems because of our inadequacy in producing the manufactures that we wish to buy and consume.

Although that explanation enjoyed brief popularity among Ministers, they now accept that we have structural problems and that our inability as an economy to produce all the goods we need is leading to our underlying difficulties. In that context, I want to draw attention to some figures which show the trends in our trade balance.

First, there are the statistics for manufactured export volumes between 1979 and 1990 produced by the United Nations on a comparable basis across most of the developed world. I emphasise that these are results, rather than forecasts, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has told us how much he prefers results. The results show that, of 14 countries, the United Kingdom comes 13th for the percentage change in manufactured export volumes since 1979. That is a clear sign of how far we are falling behind so many of our competitors.

It is evident from more recent figures for our manufactured trade that the value of our exports between 1979 and now, including the forecast figure for this year, has fallen by minus 8·7 per cent. Since 1979, the value of our trade has fallen by more than 2 per cent.—minus 2·4 per cent. precisely—as a percentage of our gross domestic product—a percentage of the wealth we earn.

The same picture is evident for volumes. Although our exports have risen by 59 per cent. since 1979, our imports have risen almost twice as much—by 108 per cent. World manufactured exports have risen by 87 per cent. Again, that paints a rather alarming picture of how we are doing against the increase in world trade.

Since 1979, our share of world manufactured exports has fallen by 15 per cent., if measured, as is most accurate, at constant prices. That is an alarming picture, which is confirmed by figures for the change in manufacturing trade balance since 1979, again as a percentage of our national wealth, our GDP. Of the 22 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for which figures are available, the United Kingdom comes 21st.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): If we put those figures into a longer historical context and look at our record since the second world war, would we not find that a 59 per cent. increase in export manufactures in the past 12 years was rather a good performance and that our percentage of world trade has stabilised during the past five or six years, which is a remarkable achievement compared with the continual decline of previous decades?

Mrs. Beckett: That would be a remarkable achievement if it were so, but, unfortunately, it is not. I agree that there was a period when our share of world trade reached a plateau and we all began to hope that the position would improve, but that is no longer the case. The overall picture that is emerging is of continuing decline. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that that has happened not only under this Government, but it has continued to happen under this Government, who have continually told us that they have enjoyed a dramatic success such as was not enjoyed by previous Governments in previous decades. Yet, comparing our performance with that of our competitors, we have done poorly—although, as we must always remind the House, we had the enormous advantage of income from the North sea, which we could have used to invest and improve that very performance. That is the evidence from the trade balance of the difficulties that we are experiencing with our manufactured trade.

I should like to produce more evidence as to the scale of the problems and why it is that the Opposition believe that manufacturing should be given so high a priority. If we look at the position of our EC competitors, there is no doubt that there has been what the Prime Minister likes to call a decline in manufacturing activity in other countries as well as here. Unfortunately, however, there is equally clear evidence to show that the decline that we are experiencing is much worse than that of our competitors.

4.30 pm

The Eurostat data on production expectations show clearly that the United Kingdom has the deepest recession. When it comes to stocks of finished products, the data show that we are more or less level pegging, in bottom position, with Spain and France. Overall, the figures show clearly that we are experiencing a more severe recession than anyone else.

If we consider the OECD countries and whether there is evidence there of a more general decline, we see that there are countries where, just as in this country, output is likely to have been lower in 1990, and that it fell for much of 1990. In other countries, the picture is somewhat mixed. Output began to rise, and fell again. In terms of the severity of the recession, however, what comes through clearly is that only in Canada or Greece is there anything like the scale of recession that there is in the United Kingdom. Even there, the picture is not as gloomy as, unfortunately, it is in this country.

From the rate of growth of manufacturing output in OECD countries between 1979 and 1990, it is clear that, in percentage terms, out of all the 16 OECD countries for which figures are available, the United Kingdom came 14th. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry drew the attention of the House to the most recent and alarming figures that we have produced

for average output. We have considered what is likely to happen, using the Government's own forecasts, during the coming year and have looked at what that means in terms of the change in output since 1979 when this Government came to power. On average, they show that output will have risen only by a mere 6 per cent. over that period of 11 years.

If we look at the most recent figures that are available to me—those for February 1991—we see that the picture is even worse than the average figures that we quoted previously. If we take the period from May 1979 to February 1991, the total increase in manufacturing output in that period amounted to a mere 3·5 per cent. These are extremely worrying figures, at a time when we are approaching the single market in 1992. We shall face more severe challenges then than we have experienced for a substantial period.

That is the information which has been made available to the House, and it shows the scale of the difficulties that we face. It brings me to the question of what we are doing about them and what action is being taken. If we look at the only measure that can possibly begin to remedy these problems—the trend of developments with regard to investment—again we see an extremely alarming picture. The figures for business investment and total investment —figures that the Government normally like to give—have taken a nose dive in the most recent months. They fell by a greater amount than we have seen since the great depression of the 1930s. If we compare the figures for the first half of 1990 to the first half of this year, we see that a decline in investment is predicted of perhaps as much as 12 per cent. Again there is no question but that that is very much the overall pattern.

The figures for investment as a proportion of gross domestic product have fallen almost continuously. Perhaps there was a slight recovery towards the middle of the 1980s. However, they are substantially below the figures that this Government inherited in 1979, and they are very much below the pattern of what was spent on investment in this country in previous years under successive Governments.

The figures for manufacturing fixed investment at constant 1985 prices show that investment is expected to come in at a lower level than that which the Government inherited in 1979. If the most recent forecasts from the Confederation of British Industry turn out be correct—we must all hope that they will not—the figures for manufacturing fixed investment are likely to go back to the levels that we saw in the 1960s. That is no way to prepare ourselves for the challenges of the single market in 1992.

If we look at what our competitors are doing in manufacturing fixed investments, on the figures per person employed in manufacturing among the OECD 15, we see, on the most recent figures that we have, the United Kingdom coming in 14th. As those were the figures for 1988, when, by the Government's standards, there was something of an investment boom, the position now may be even worse.

Nor is that the case only for investment in manufacturing generally. Our competitors are increasing their investment in research and development, but if we look at the change in Government-funded civil research and development, we come 18th out of the OECD 19 for the period 1985-89, when, we are told, there was a boom in investment. If we look at the figures for Government-funded research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product, we see that we are 12th out of the OECD 19 and, in terms of per head of population, we are 13th out of the OECD 19.

In summary, manufacturing output is falling; manufacturing investment as a percentage of gross domestic product has fallen since 1979 by 12·7 per cent. at constant prices; manufacturing fixed investment, excluding leased assets by almost 15 per cent.; and that including leased assets by almost 14 per cent. That is an alarming picture when we consider the background to these figures and this summary.

That brings me to the prospects for recovery. The Chancellor said the other day that recovery was around the corner, but I am not sure what corner that is. It must be one that is rather a long way away. According to the Government's figures in the Red Book, the recovery will be consumer-led rather than, as one would hope, investment-led and laying the foundations for a more prosperous economy.

I am not sure how many hon. Members have seen the report in the *Financial Times* this morning of the most recent survey of expectations from academics, economists, study institutions and others. It shows increasing anxiety about the strength of the recovery, when it begins, and a suggestion that it might be fragile and weak at best. There are worries about the Government's reliance on growth in real incomes and consumer spending rather than in structural improvements to pull us out of recession and into recovery.

Perhaps most interesting of all—given the Government's time scale, which seems to be focusing on the general election—the economists predict that, although there will be a recovery and inflation will begin to fall, by early 1992 inflation will have begun to climb again, interest rates will have stopped falling and the trade gap will have begun to widen. That is an alarming prospect for the country and a difficult one for the Government, who are clearly trying to time the election for that period after the recovery has occurred and before the deterioration that is so widely expected becomes evident.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): So the hon. Lady admits that there will be a recovery.

Mrs. Beckett: We have never denied that there will be a recovery. I am astonished at the Chief Secretary, who is brighter than he is trying to pretend. Of course there will be a recovery. When the economy is absolutely flat on the floor, the situation would be desperate indeed if there were never to be a recovery. The question is when it will occur, to what extent, and—most important of all—whether it can be sustained. We have to ask ourselves whether this country is taking the necessary action to prepare itself for long-term prosperity rather than short-term recovery, which, it is predicted, will be—in the words of the Chancellor about the recession—possibly shallow and short-lived.

I should like, in this context, to draw attention to these words of the president of the CBI:

> "Investment in training, innovation, research and development, as well as in fixed capital, adds to the nation's productive capacity, enhances its efficiency and speeds up its eventual economic recovery."

The following words fit in very well with the observations of a variety of experts I have been quoting:

> "If we do not expand this capacity we will not be able to sustain renewed economic growth for very long. Once industry is back working near its full capacity, further

increases in spending could not be met with higher output but would simply result in those familiar problems of rising prices, surging imports and current account deficits, which we experienced in the late 1980s."

Against that background, I am moving this amendment to enable us to raise the issue of investment allowances specifically targeted at manufacturing industry. This is in complete contrast to the underlying philosophy behind the changes that the Government are making through the Budget and the Finance Bill. The reduction in the rate of corporation tax will lead to reduced business costs across the board. No doubt that is welcome to businesses, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, but the benefit is not targeted at any group of companies or any sector of the economy. The welcome, however, is tempered by realisation of the fact that the reduction in business costs is counterbalanced by increases in business costs, such as the one resulting from the change in national insurance contributions. Then there are those matters that are not covered by the Finance Bill, such as changes in the statutory sick pay scheme and the increase in the business rate, which have added substantially to business costs, and which everyone knows are matters of considerable concern to industry and commerce.

Let me refer to what the Opposition see as the real significance of the Government's decision to concentrate on cuts in the rate of corporation tax, rather than to provide the investment allowances for which so much of industry was calling. I know that some groups, such as the Institute of Directors, are always pleading for cuts in tax rates, but the Government must be aware of the widespread view that investment allowances—particularly allowances targeted at manufacturing industry—would have been the right means of helping business. The Government must be aware of the views of the Engineering Employers' Federation, the CBI and the TUC. We all know, of course, that they ignore the TUC.

The really revealing fact is that, even when industry itself asks the Government to do something that would not reduce business costs across the board but give priority to the encouragement of investment—directly in manufacturing, and indirectly in training—the Government are not prepared to agree. The resources available to the Government are bound to be limited. In response to the call for targeted help, particularly for those sectors of industry that are the agents of recovery, the agents of growth, surely the Government ought to take account of that fact, especially when we are in the depths of such a recession, and when we have such a record of difficulties.

The decision not to reintroduce investment allowances, but instead to cut the rate of corporation tax, was not a practical one dictated by the recession, by a wish to promote investment more than anything else—in particular, to promote investment in manufacturing industry. It was an ideological decision—a decision that fits in with the overall attitude, which the Government have adopted for so many years, that, even when industry itself seeks targeted help of this kind, they should stand aloof and say that it has nothing to do with them. The Government's attitude is that they should make changes for the whole of industry, and leave the rest to individual firms. They do not care whether companies use assistance for the purpose of repairing their balance sheets, rather than for investment purposes.

4.45 pm

That, too, is closely related to the speech that the Chancellor made last week—to the Adam Smith Institute, I think—in which he said that the Government intended to continue to pursue exactly the course that they have pursued for the past 11 or 12 years. They intend to stand aloof from industry and say, "Get on with it, and don't expect us to involve ourselves in any way. Don't expect us to make even the most indirect choices about the priorities that you should be pursuing." This is particularly interesting to me, because the decision to follow the path—advocated by the Institute of Directors—of reducing the rate of taxation and increasing taxes on expenditure ties in with the long-term approach that that institute is urging on the Government. It seeks the erosion, and, over five or 10 years, the ultimate abolition, of all taxes on companies, all taxes on capital and, indeed, all taxes on income.

Perhaps some increases in taxes on expenditure are necessary, but what is sought, as a *quid pro quo* for those changes, is the disappearance of what is loosely described as the welfare state, which is taken for granted by so many people in this country. The Institute of Directors has the courage to do what the Government have never had the courage to do—explicitly to explain that, as a trade-off for cuts in tax rates, leading to substantial reductions in taxes, it would like to see the Government foster increased use of private retirement insurance, private education insurance, private unemployment insurance and private health insurance—with a scheme retained and supported by the state only for the destitute, for whom, clearly, the move towards private insurance schemes as a whole cannot be sustained.

To me, it is very revealing, as well as very frightening, that the Government intend to continue along the ideological path on which they have embarked, which ties in so well with the action that is urged on them by groups such as the Institute of Directors and the No Turning Back group of Conservative Members of Parliament. This measure is a signal, like those provided by the Chancellor, that there is indeed no change in the Government's attitude to industry; no change in the role that they see for themselves; no recognition of the need for any kind of partnership with industry and commerce; no recognition —worse of all, in the face of the alarming figures indicating the real prospects for our economy—that they have a duty to plan, in the national interest, to sustain the long-term competitiveness of our economy. The Opposition have tabled this amendment because they see a very clear ideological and philosophical divide with the Government on the issue. Unfortunately, actions such as those which the Government have taken will not contribute to the long-term prosperity of the country.

Mr. Mellor: Clause 22, to which this amendment relates, is straightforward. I say "straightforward" because the density, when one comes to Finance Bills from other legislation, takes some getting used to. On this occasion, I have the advantage of starting off with something that is reasonably straightforward. I do not need a long glossary to enable me to comprehend the basic language. The other clause that I shall be dealing with tonight, clause 23, has the advantage of being even more straightforward.

It may be appropriate just to recall, before we plunge into the thicket of point and counterpoint, that subsection (1) of clause 22 reduces the corporation tax rate for the

[Mr. Mellor]

financial year 1990 from 35 per cent. to 34 per cent. and, of course, it is linked to clauses 23 and 24. Clause 23 reduces the corporation tax rate to 33 per cent. for the year 1991 and clause 24 deals with changes to the small companies' rate. The other two subsections of clause 22 deal with the taper mechanism between the level at which the small companies' rate applies and the profit levels before one arrives at the full rate of 34 per cent. It makes certain adjustments to that so that there is no great cliff edge between the small companies' rate and the main rate.

As this is one of the centrepieces of the Budget, it is appropriate that we should start with it today. A major reduction is being proposed, in this and related clauses, in the tax burden on industry. Although obviously it is the duty of Oppositions to carp and cavil—and the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has carped and cavilled—this is a very significant step forward, because, as I shall later demonstrate, it once again gives us the keenest corporation tax rates of any of the world's major economies. That is something of which we can be proud.

As for the lyrical picture that we were painted of what life was apparently like in the 1970s—although I am bound to say that I do not remember it that way and I wonder who, in truth, does—it is worth remembering that in 1979 the main rate of corporation tax was 52 per cent. We are debating a proposal to reduce it to 34 per cent. and we hope that in a subsequent debate the House will approve its reduction to 33 per cent. Back in those balmy days of 1978-79, Labour's last full financial year, the small companies' rate was 42 per cent. Today it is 25 per cent. In those days, 12 years ago, the small companies' rate——

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I will give way when I have finished giving the figures. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has some responsibility for these matters, so I will present him with the full picture and then happily give way.

The small companies' rate was incurred on profits of £60,000. Our proposal is that in 1991 the small companies' rate shall not apply until profits of £250,000 are attained —over four times as much in cash terms, so a very substantial increase in real terms.

The marginal relief threshold, the taper that applies up to the main level, means that we propose that this year a company shall become liable to pay the full rate of corporation tax only when its profits exceed £1·25 million. That contrasts with the threshold at which full corporation tax was paid under Labour of £100,000. It is an increase of over 1200 per cent. That is a sign of just how dramatic has been the reduction of the tax burden on industry and it is something that we should never forget.

Mr. Sheldon: Is that a fair way to make that comparison? Surely the comparison should be made with the amount that industry paid out in corporation tax. There were allowances and reliefs of a number of kinds, as I am sure the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, and industry asks only how much it will have to pay. It is not just these headline figures that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is putting out. On that basis, industry is doing very badly at the present time and more assistance needs to be given to it.

Mr. Mellor: It is certainly true that part of the trade-off for the reduction in corporation tax was the removal of some elements of capital allowance, stock allowances and so on. I was proposing to come to that, since it is of the essence in the debate between us. But it is undoubtedly true that the burden of taxation on business has been lightened by the Government and it is the purpose of the Budget to burden industry even less. That is a principal theme of this Budget.

It is worth referring to some international comparisons to make the point. They show that our main rate of corporation tax for 1991, at 33 per cent., compares with a rate of 50 per cent. in Germany—36 per cent. on distributed profits—and over 40 per cent. in a range of other EC countries.

The comparison becomes even more interesting when one looks at the total tax burden on business as a percentage of total gross domestic product—that is, counting in taxes on corporate profits, employers' social security contributions and payroll taxes and then expressing it as a percentage of total GDP for the last year for which figures are available, which is 1988. That shows that in the United Kingdom corporate profits are 4 per cent. and total social security contributions 3·5 per cent., leading to a total burden of 7·5 per cent., expressed as a percentage of total GDP. That compares with 15 per cent. in France, 12·4 per cent. in Italy and over 9 per cent. in West Germany. So, compared to the EC average, at 7·5 per cent. we are markedly and handily below the EC average of 9·7 per cent. and below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average of 8·9 per cent.

If one wants a reason why Britain, far from being the investment desert that the hon. Lady has described, has become the favoured place for inward investment in the European Community, there it is. I see that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is amused by this, so I will give him the opportunity later to intervene. If any of my figures are wrong, I hope that he will correct me and put me out of my misery.

Thirty-nine per cent. of the inward investment in the European Community from outside the Community in the last year for which figures are available, 1989, came to Britain. France was next with just over 14 per cent. Of the inward investment available from the major non-EC manufacturing countries, no less than two thirds of United States' investment in the EC came to the United Kingdom, as did 40 per cent. of the Japanese. That is a vote of confidence in the United Kingdom and in the tax rates, and not just the tax rates on business but the tax rates on individuals, which are just as relevant.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I am grateful to the Chief Secretary for giving way. I was not in any sense scoffing at the idea or prospect of inward investment, which is very welcome and essential. I was scoffing at the Chief Secretary's denial of the fact that we have at the moment in this country an investment desert. That is precisely what we have. Investment in industry as a whole is forecast by the Government themselves to fall by 10 per cent. in the course of this year, and investment in manufacturing industry is forecast to fall by even more. Investment in manufacturing industry is now at a lower level than when the Government came into office 12 years ago. I call that an investment desert.

Mr. Mellor: Most of the hon. Gentleman's comparisons are with the position at a historic high achieved under the very tax regime that the hon. Member for Derby, South spent most of her time attacking. The reduction in corporate taxation and the overall confidence in the United Kingdom engendered by a whole range of supply-side measures, particularly the breaking of the stranglehold of trade unions over so much of the economic activity in the country, led to a tremendous outburst of investment in this country. Between 1986 and 1989 alone investment increased by over 40 per cent. It is inevitable that there will be a falling-off from that peak, but the fact that it may fall by 10 per cent. does not seem to me to be any kind of indictment of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will develop the argument, if I may, and then of course I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davies *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I have told the right hon. Gentleman that I shall give way to him when I have fully answered the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. That is the way that I have always dealt with matters in Committee and I hope that it finds favour with other hon. Members —*[Interruption]*—apart from the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), who has a voice of dissent which should be registered.

5 pm

If we take investment in manufacturing at constant 1985 prices, in 1984, when the fundamental changes in the corporation tax regime were made, it was £8·9 billion. In 1989 it rose to £12·4 billion. It is true that in 1990 it fell back to £11·9 billion. That is a reflection of the dramatic increase in recent years. There is absolutely no reason to expect that investment will not go back once confidence is restored and activity begins to turn up, as the hon. Lady conceded that it will. We know that it will.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Having had a low rate of taxation in comparison with the Germans, and having had a massive investment boom over the past three or four years, why have we such a massive deficit on trade and manufacturing goods with those very EC countries that have a higher rate of corporation tax?

Mr. Mellor: In fact, we have for the first time, in 1988 and 1989, seen an increase in Britain's share of world manufactured exports.

Mr. Davies: Answer the question.

Mr. Mellor: I am answering the question. The right hon. Gentleman does not do himself much service by barracking me from a sedentary position. I will give the explanation and, if he wants to intervene again, I will let him. He might listen to the answer because I hope that it will get near the point.

The point is that for the first time, after years and years and years of decline, Britain's share of world manufacturing exports has started to rise—by a very small amount, it is true. The fact that our manufacturing trade balance is in deficit with a number of countries is a reflection of consumer choice and the tremendous increase in wealth.

I will give the right hon. Gentleman an example. As a former Treasury Minister he will recall that the man on average wages, with a non-working wife and two dependent children, was £1 a week better off in real terms at the end of Labour's period of office than at the beginning of it. Today that same family is £72 a week better off in real terms. Obviously a great deal of that spending power is expressed in purchasing imported goods. There is no doubt about it. Everyone associated with British manufacturing is only too well aware that, although British manufacturers have improved their performance in a range of areas, not least the car industry, which under the Government has been much more of a success story than it ever was under Labour——

Mr. Denzil Davies *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will finish the point and then I shall give way. There are still areas in which, when put to the choice in a free market—it is impossible within the European Community to think in other terms, notwithstanding Labour's nostalgia for import controls and such things —many British families prefer to buy overseas goods. That is their free choice.

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman made an admission. As I understand it, he is saying that one reason why we have a massive balance of payments deficit is that the Government have cut taxation and income taxation. Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Mellor: That seems to be an argument by the right hon. Gentleman that he does not like people having more money in their pockets. That is a nonsensical position. We believe in spreading prosperity through society. Indeed, our record on that is far superior. When the right hon. Gentleman walks round his constituency and goes into people's kitchens, where he sees cookers, transistor radios and hi-fi systems, does he abuse the people for spending their money on imported goods, or does he resent the fact that today they have those goods when 12 years ago they did not? That is part and parcel of living in a society where the consumer, given resources, will make his or her choice, as is right.

The Government decided in 1984 to move to sharp reductions in the direct taxation of companies. As to the consequences, I have already pointed to the tremendous increase in investment in business which was so apparent and which will happen again, and also to the tremendous growth in jobs. Over 3 million jobs have been created in our economy since 1983.

Contrary to the industry-friendly gloss that the hon. Lady put on her proposal, what we see is really the second leg of Labour's twin attack on industry. The attack mounted today is an assault on the principle of letting industry choose what it wants to do with its own money. The idea is that a raft of incentives to invest, not yet disclosed but presumably not in things that industry would choose but in things that the Labour party would want to choose for industry, is to be preferred to allowing industry to have choice.

All the evidence of the seven years since the dramatic switch was made is that not only has investment increased, but the quality of investment has increased. I do not want that to dominate the debate. There will be plenty of other opportunities for that. It will be a most interesting debate.

On Sunday, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) revealed the precise extent of Labour's attack on the very people who are running

[Mr. Mellor]

business—the middle managers and top management on whom our success depends. Under Labour, they would find their rate of tax increased from 40 per cent. to 59 per cent. All that would happen then would be an increase in the brain drain. We thought that we had done away with the brain drain.

The record shows that between 1975 and 1979 there was a net outflow of 68,000 professional and managerial people, whereas between 1983 and 1989 there was a net inflow of 30,000. That is part and parcel of creating a tax system which allows the decision-takers within industry, on whom a successful base depends, to keep a sensible proportion of their income. It is already being trailed in the newspapers that if people feel that they are returning to the tax rates that prevailed 10 years ago, they will again vote with their feet. Those are all reasons why the Labour party's proposals will come under increasing scruitiny.

I was anxious to focus primarily on company taxation. Now I shall deal with the amendment, which is extremely vague. The hon. Lady did not give us a crucial fact among the welter of statistics: what would be the cost of the attempt to determine for industry its investment decisions? We have had difficulty with that because much of the amendment is extremely vague. It is a classic example of the Opposition trying to have it both ways. On the one hand they are trying to hold out to those interested in the outside world that they have a precise set of remedies which mean that they will do better than we are doing, while on the other they withhold key pieces of information which allow the full implications of what they are doing to sink in. They must not think that we are not alive to that fact.

The amendment appears on one reading to be merely giving away a lot of money after deadweight investment. It appears to be willing ex post facto to subsidise certain investments that have already been made. I cannot see the point of that. Even if only new investment will be affected, even on a cautious estimate—for instance, costing the difference between the existing and the proposed reliefs for new investment only, assuming that investment continues at its present level, and not building in any increase that may take place within the period—in 1991-92 the likely enhanced cost would be about £200 million and in 1992-93 it would be a further £150 million.

Of course, the hon. Lady has not told us where that fits in with Labour's spending priorities, and what would have to give. The amendment gives a hint—a little tease—of an increase in corporation tax, which would be used to pay for it. That shows what the hon. Lady correctly described as a philosophical divide between the two parties. The Government believe in leaving industry to make decisions, based on it maximising the amount of profit that it retains in its hands for its own uses. In the long term, that will create a much more dynamic economy. I would rather trust a business man to make the decisions than the men in Whitehall. Labour is hankering back to the dirigiste approach to economic management that failed when it was last in office, and that has now been shown comprehensively to fail in those eastern European countries where it was the prevailing orthodoxy.

Mrs. Beckett: It is important to put on the record the fact that we have repeatedly said that we have no intention of increasing the rate of corporation tax. The Chief Secretary should be aware of that, but if he is not I am happy to tell him.

Mr. Mellor: What I do not understand—and perhaps the hon. Lady will explain it to me—is the meaning of the reference in the amendment to a rate of corporation tax of 34·01 per cent. That is the proposed increase in the rate of corporation tax——

Mrs. Beckett: The Chief Secretary's civil servants could have explained that to him without any difficulty. It is purely a question of the technicalities of how to draft an amendment while being in order.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): The hon. Lady does not understand her own amendment.

Mrs. Beckett: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, that was an extraordinarily silly comment. Of course we understand our amendment. We had to draft the amendment in a certain way so that it would be in order for the tabling of amendments to the Finance Bill. There is no, and never has been any, suggestion of the Labour party increasing the rate of corporation tax.

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her clarity. It appears that, although the amendment proposes an increase in corporation tax, under pressure the hon. Lady said that she did not really mean it and it was just an attempt to keep within order. If so, that raises the question of what will pay for the proposal. Does she agree that, even on the most cautious estimate, it will cost at least £200 million in the first year and £150 million in the second year? Has she costed the proposal?

Mrs. Beckett: It is difficult to obtain accurate costings—a point that the Chief Secretary also made. We are offering our alternative to the Government's proposals and the Chief Secretary has identified the sums involved. If we targeted that sort of money on encouraging investment in manufacturing industry, rather than simply handing out money to industry, as the Government are doing in the Bill, there would be more value for our money.

Mr. Mellor: This is just a taste of things to come. As we get closer to an election, suddenly the newspapers are interested not only in what the Government are doing, but in what the Labour party is doing. That was evident in this weekend's newspapers. We now have another classic example of the Labour party's gesture politics. It is making a gesture towards what it regards as a disaffected section of the business community—those who would hanker after the good old days of investment allowances. It is flinging a little something in their direction as a bit of a tease without being prepared to say what that amounts to.

When put on the spot, the Labour party says that its proposal will not require an increase in corporation tax—it is to be a free lunch. It will be a further subsidy to business, and someone will have to pay for it. I thought that we now had a Labour party of fiscal rectitude, with everything that is spent having to be paid for. We have not been given the costings for this proposal. Instead, we are told that it is a virtue of a detailed amendment—not a Second Reading debate or an Opposition Supply day—running to more than 20 lines not to provide any costings. Our cautious costing of £200 million, which does not assume any subsidy of pre-existing investment, is simply to

be added to the dead weight of Labour's spending proposals—for which, sooner or later, people will have to pick up the tab.

The Leader of the Opposition misunderstands the fundamental basis of VAT, and we have been told that VAT is sacrosanct. We have also been told that the top rate of income tax absolutely will not go above 50 per cent. We are now told that corporation tax will not be increased. The range of choices from which the additional resources could come is now rather limited. Indeed, there is only one source—and this will not surprise anyone who admired the career of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) when he was Chancellor—and that is income tax. The burden will fall on middle and lower-income, standard rate taxpayers. That is the uncomfortable truth that will become increasingly apparent.

5.15 pm

Labour Governments regularly start by soaking the rich. By the end of the time in office of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, the rich had come to embrace even those poor souls who were hoping for an inflation increase in the income tax threshold to take them out of income tax, but the right hon. Gentleman was unable to afford that for large parts of his stewardship.

Mr. Chris Smith: Can the Chief Secretary explain why in 1979 the share of gross domestic product taken in tax by the Exchequer was 34 per cent., but it is now 37·5 per cent.?

Mr. Mellor: There has been a dramatic increase in a whole range of activities. Even with the urgent prioritisation that we have undertaken, there has been an increase in public expenditure. We fund our expenditure; we do not rely—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not want to hear this point because they do not like it. Under the stewardship of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, in one year alone, at today's prices, the public sector borrowing requirement was £60 billion. I have already said, but it bears repeating, that the Labour party believes in the late President Hoover's proposition, "Blessed are the young, for they shall inherit the national debt." The Labour party would saddle future generations with costs that it is not prepared to fund properly.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury increasingly must focus on the fact that if that is what it takes for the Government to run honest public finances and the level of public expenditure that we are currently running, how on earth will the Labour party cope with the public expenditure that will be needed to fulfil its pledges? The Labour party apparently wishes to remain constant to the exchange rate mechanism, which will not allow it to run up a huge public sector borrowing requirement without threatening Britain's position within the system.

Mr. Chris Smith: I am grateful to the Chief Secretary for acknowledging that the Government have increased the tax burden on the British people. Will he also confirm that, for a family on three quarters of the average wage, the tax burden has increased from 30·9 per cent. of income in 1978-79 to 33·6 per cent. in 1991-92?

Mr. Mellor: That question does not deal with the points that will be of most relevance to such families: their income, the amount by which it has increased, and the real increase in their prosperity. I have already given the figures. The disposable income of all families, including those below the average wage, has increased sharply. If it has been necessary for the Government to take certain measures to put public finances on a level that attracts international confidence, and so allows us to maintain our position within the ERM—to which the Labour party says it is as committed as the Government—and if it has been necessary to prioritise public expenditure and so increase expenditure on key public services, such as health, by up to 50 per cent. in real terms, what are the prospects for the Labour party, with its raft of additional spending commitments, yet without any proposals on how to fund them? It will not be able to run up the public sector borrowing requirement in the way that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East took for granted. That is something on which the Opposition will need to focus because we shall return to it in due course, although at a time that is almost certainly not now.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that precisely the same people would suffer under Labour as suffered last time, the school teachers and the nurses, who suffered from massively increased taxation and national insurance contributions and who, under the Opposition's categorisation, will be known as the rich? They certainly were not rich under Labour. They are a great deal better off now.

Mr. Mellor: Indeed, and a number of such groups saw a fall in the real spending power of their incomes during that period.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Minister think that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) knows that this Government put up the rate of national insurance contributions from 6 to 9 per cent.?

Mr. Mellor: We are talking about people's disposable incomes. That is the key point. When we talk to our constituents on the doorstep, we discover that they are concerned about what they can buy this year compared with five or 10 years ago. On that test, this has been one of the most spectacularly successful decades ever in Britain. I suspect that, as the election approaches and the Labour party's expenditure proposals are scrutinised with the rigour that they will be, and their tax proposals similarly, people will begin to realise that these are boons which do not necessarily translate into a new Government, unless it happens to be a Conservative Government.

The hon. Lady, as she was bound to do, has attempted to discredit the Government's record on the treatment of industry, but she knows only too well that whatever quibbles there may be from time to time in a relationship in which industry will always feel free to make its points, as we feel free to make ours, two things emerge from all that has been said by the CBI, the Institute of Directors and others. First, there is a recognition of the tremendous success of the 1980s and the fundamental and beneficial changes that were made to the United Kingdom economy then. Secondly, there is the welcome that they gave to the Budget. I have already quoted in these debates—I shall not weary the House further with them, although I could if pressed—the glowing welcome given to the Budget by every collective body representing industries, such as the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce.

I shall just quote the president of the CBI, Sir Brian Corby, who said:

[Mr. Mellor]

"This is almost precisely the Budget that the CBI recommended—a Budget for soundly based recovery, for saving and for investment. The prospect for further reductions in interest rates, the resumption of growth and low inflation are better tonight than they were this morning. The Chancellor has listened to those who create the nation's wealth."

Obviously, in what is not a monochrome society, and I hope never will be, there will be some who will look back with nostalgia to the good old days of investment allowances and so on, but I do not think that there are all that many of those. Most people recognise that in the end a business that retains more of its profits will be better able to direct itself and to make its own decisions, which should not be distorted by Government.

So much of the debate, which inevitably, Sir Paul, as the first debate on this year's Finance Bill, you have been kind enough to allow to go a little wider than the immediate matter under discussion,comes down to the recession and its ending. It is clear from all sides that, while undoubtedly this has been a sharp and difficult period through which companies have had to go and are still having to go, a growth of optimism is now becoming apparent. It was apparent last week in the CBI's latest analysis of opinion. It is even more apparent today with the publication of the Institute of Directors' bi-monthly survey which shows optimism about the economy recovering sharply at plus 33 per cent. from minus 64 per cent. in February, directors' confidence about prospects for their own companies up to plus 37 per cent. from minus 36 per cent. in February, and 35 per cent. of respondents expecting a positive net investment in the next six months.

I appreciate that many companies still have a good way to go, but I believe that it is clear that confidence has returned and that what we are proposing in the Finance Bill will assist industry's cash flow, will assist in the building of that confidence and will assist in the measured and strong recovery of the British economy from the difficulties of the last several months. On that basis, I hope that in due course the House will not accept the Opposition's amendment but will endorse the principles of clause 22.

Mr. Sheldon: The Chief Secretary quoted with approval those who had accepted many of the arguments of the Budget and who had welcomed it. I, like many others, have in my time made the fairly obvious comment that a Budget that is cheered when the Chancellor sits down is often disliked and disapproved of by the time we reach Third Reading. Iain Macleod was one of those who made that comment.

Another comment that Iain Macleod made during the course of a Finance Bill debate was that one of the least useful arguments in discussing any amendment is to talk about its defective aspects and to pick holes in it. He pointed out frequently, and eventually silenced those who opposed the argument, of which I was not one, that it is the Government who have the resources to cost measures and to make the proper amendments if they feel convinced by the arguments. I recommend that course of action to the Chief Secretary and others on the Treasury Bench.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was right to table an amendment of this kind on one of the crucial issues of our time. It is of enormous importance that we realise the damage that has been done to manufacturing industry and come to accept the need for changes in so many aspects of the way in which Governments deal with it. There was a time when the Government scorned manufacturing industry; it was just one of many, and it was the service industries that were the industries of the future. It was only as time went on that they began to realise—it has come rather late, and it has not come wholeheartedly even now in some quarters—that the importance of manufacturing industry is that it is the base of the economy from which so many things follow.

The fact that there has been a loss of investment means that we shall find ourselves in great difficulties in getting our balance of trade right. The important thing about our balance of trade is that, if investment has been so good, why do we have a balance of trade deficit at present? Why is our balance of payments currently so weak? We are in the middle of a deep recession, and no one can underestimate its extent. Everything that is said about the future of the recession is only guess work; nobody knows. I, and I am sure many other hon. Members here, speak to a number of business men every week, and we know that there is no question but that they are suffering and that the problems are even more serious in manufacturing industry. It is right that we should press these matters upon the Government and inform them of what is really going on in the country at present.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one reason why investment has not borne fruit in trade is that, in the main, it has been in non-tradable activities such as banking, finance, communication and property?. Investment in tradable activities—items that have been traded across the exchanges—has been very low.

Mr. Sheldon: That is absolutely right. It is a point that I would certainly wish to make myself. My hon. Friend knows my addiction to investment in plant and machinery. It is that which is the fountainhead of exports of manufactured goods. I have always wanted to encourage such investment. Investment can be a carpet in an office, making a grand office which produces nothing but which creates an impression. Britain needs to increase its manufacturing exports, but given the increase in world trade, that is not enough; imports must be considered as well. The European Community, as well as the general agreement on tariffs and trade, has played a part in increasing world trade, which I wholeheartedly welcome. However, our exports need to rise with it, and Britain is rather weak in that respect.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The hon. Gentleman was rightly enthusing about the European Community, but I cannot go along with his view concerning protectionism. The draft treaty articles prepared with a view to achieving political union have been resolutely kept away from the Library for some time. However, a copy has been deposited in the House, and is now available. It is known as a non-paper, but in the light of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, perhaps he would care to consider the implications of that draft treaty on a single currency and on other measures that some of us might regard as rather protectionist.

5.30 pm

Mr. Sheldon: I have always been in favour of a Europe that is open and free, but I have discerned a number of restrictive aspects in the Community. I was merely referring to the increase in world trade and to Britain's need to export more manufactured goods to match it.

Whenever one talks today to industrialists, or to the executives of any type of company, a large part of the conversation always concerns credit control. People are worried stiff about firms going under, others paying late, and still others turning into bad debts. I welcome the Budget's provisions for bad debt relief, but it is only giving back money that companies should never have risked in the first place had they known that a bad debt was likely to develop. It is a useful provision, but not a cause for much satisfaction.

I know of some companies that are having to reprogramme their computers to allow not for 120 days credit—which is the normal period at the top of the range—but for 150, 180 or even 210 days, in calculating how they stand in relation to some of their slow payers. One used to pay value added tax in arrears, which produced a cash flow, but today VAT generates a negative cash flow, in most cases, if not all, which is a burden on industry that it did not used to bear to anything like the same extent.

Companies are compelled to divert a substantial portion of their resources to credit control. One can tell from recruitment advertising that credit control managers—some of whom have almost reached the status of directors—are much more important than they used to be. Much of that is due to high interest rates and inflation.

A country's balance of trade is a serious matter when it is in the middle of a recession. No one knows when, or if, recovery will come. It is all pure guesswork. President Hoover spoke about recovery being around the corner, and about "normalcy". He really believed that nonsense, but had no basis for doing so. The only basis for our faith in a recovery is our belief that the world is subject to a virtuous cycle of growth, interrupted by recession now and again. However, we cannot know when things will change, or if they will change. No one can predict whether an improvement will come in the summer, autumn or winter. Anyone who wants to try, by reading the entrails of a chicken, is welcome to do so—but all those people who speak of a recovery have no more insight than anyone else.

We used to have stock relief when inflation increased, because companies were being charged corporation tax on notional profits. They were buying their stock at a higher value, and being charged higher corporation tax accordingly. The same is happening today. If inflation is running at 10 per cent., and one is paying corporation tax of 33, 34 or 35 per cent., one is being charged 3 per cent. extra because of one's stockholding. Worse still, the biggest stockholder is manufacturing industry, which not only has stock but work in progress.

Mr. Tim Smith: My recollection is that the right hon. Gentleman was one of the Treasury Ministers who introduced stock relief in 1975 when inflation was running at 25 per cent. Company cash flow became so dire that there was no alternative, if widespread liquidations throughout industry were to be avoided. Surely getting down inflation should be the priority, because then we would not have to worry about whether or not to tax stock.

Mr. Sheldon: I could not agree more, but one must remember that the inflation of 25·9 per cent. to which the hon. Gentleman referred resulted from the boom in oil prices, which increased fivefold. In 1980, Britain had 21·9 per cent. inflation as a result of the Government's own stupid actions after they had been in office a year. That arose from the belief that VAT could be doubled but that prices would not be affected because the Government controlled the money supply. Rarely has such economic nonsense been spoken in the House than at that time, when the Government claimed that inflation at 21·9 per cent. could not happen because they would restrict pay levels by the monetary aggregate being held in check. I agree that the best thing is to reduce inflation—but where it exists, it must be dealt with and brought down in other ways.

Recovery is supposed to come from consumer confidence. What is that meant to mean? Is it meant to mean spending our way out of a recession? Are we really looking for a consumer boom? Is that the proper way to achieve recovery? I have never heard such nonsense. It is ridiculous to engineer a boom for political reasons. Real recovery can come only through investment or exports. One way of achieving that is to increase investment so that British industry can both improve its exports and compete better with imports. One should never underestimate the importance of import competition. More firms have closed as a consequence of import competition ruining their industry, and because of their failure to act, than from their failure to achieve desirable export levels.

The great economies became dominant through manufacturing industry—not through the provision of services or by devising clever ideas in the City. They are important, but they should translate industrial success into commercial success. That is their value.

One thinks of the great British economy of the 19th century, of the United States towards the end of last century and up to the start of the second world war, and of today's great economies of Germany and Japan. They were all created through manufacturing industry. Those of us who wantonly ignore that truth are failing to learn one of the most important lessons of our time.

When Britain faced great problems in the past, we tended to unite and to deal with those difficulties in a sensible way that satisfied the expectations of most people, if not all. We have failed utterly to do so on this occasion, which is what I find so bad.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary found it difficult to understand the Opposition's aim in tabling the amendment. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who spoke to it, failed spectacularly to explain what the amendment was about or what its practical consequences would be.

The hon. Lady began by trying to paint as gloomy a picture as possible of the state of the economy and of the prospects for recovery, but the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and she will know that the predictions of recovery are based not on crystal ball gazing but on many well-established indicators with which the right hon. Gentleman will be familiar from his time at the Treasury. Those indicators are a substantial recovery in stock market prices, a considerable fall in interest rates and an improvement in confidence reported by industrial surveys. After a lapse of time, all those indicators have traditionally and invariably led to a recovery in the

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underlying economy. My only suggestion to my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury is that the Government might consider introducing another indicator—the urgency with which the Opposition are calling for an early election.

The fact that the Opposition are now looking forward to a recovery—the hon. Lady admitted that—has sharpened the stridency of their calls for an early election before the recovery takes place and before the benefits of the policies which the Government have followed for the past two years are evident. Their calls for an election may be maintained for the time being, but as the year progresses, and as the evidence of the economic recovery develops—as it will—it will be seen that the Opposition hope to have an opportunity to test public opinion at a time when those benefits have not yet come through.

I am baffled by the message which the amendment is meant to contain, because the amendment does not bear much relationship to the hon. Lady's speech. I was disappointed in what she said as I remember her days as an Education Minister when she used to do her homework and did not talk such nonsense. She said that the amendment, which would have a retrospective effect on capital allowances for manufacturing industry in previous financial years, was designed to promote investment in manufacturing industry. I ask her a simple question: is it the Opposition's policy to introduce a permanent extra incentive to capital investment by manufacturing industry, along the lines of that contained in subsection (2)(b) of the amendment? Is that the Labour party's intention?

Mrs. Beckett: We have made it clear that the amendment is intended to raise the issue of investment allowances. We have also made it clear for some time that we think it is especially important to target the allowances on manufacturing in the context of a recession. The allowances would not necessarily be permanent. If the right hon. Gentleman is not aware of that, he has not done his homework.

Mr. Stewart: It is strange that the hon. Lady should raise the issue of investment allowances but have no idea about Labour's policy. It is typical of the way in which the Opposition Treasury spokesmen go about their business. They made a complete nonsense of the shadow Budget. They got their sums wrong and deceived the public and the House.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stewart: I shall give way in a moment, but I shall finish my point. The Opposition's calculations are a disgraceful deception.

5.45 pm

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Member is untruthful as well as extremely unpleasant. He is also inaccurate. If he were to check the record, he would find that the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor conceded that our calculations were correct. This is the third occasion during a brief speech in which—*[Interruption.]* The Chief Secretary said that our figures for child benefit were correct if one did not feed the increase in child benefit into child support, which we did not intend to do. The Chief Secretary is again confirming that our figures were correct.

The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) has not been speaking for very long. He has been insulting and unpleasant on three occasions. I do not mind that—I expect it of him—but if he accuses me of inaccuracy, he should get his facts right.

Mr. Stewart: I shall leave my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to deal with that, but the hon. Lady makes my point for me—I touched a raw nerve. She will have to do better. She said that she did not know whether it was Labour party policy to introduce extra subsidies for industrial investment. She wants to raise the issue but she has no policy. She said that Labour's policy was to promote industrial investment. How can a subsidy on investment that has already taken place be a policy to promote industrial investment? It is nonsense from start to finish. I am sorry to have to point that out in blunt terms, and the hon. Lady may think me discourteous, but if she tables nonsensical amendments she deserves to have them described as such.

The hon. Lady also said that we need to discriminate in favour of manufacturing industry. I wonder whether the Labour party has forgotten all the lessons that it learned 20 years ago about selective employment tax. It tried to introduce a subsidy to manufacturing investment by constructing a system of favourable taxation to companies that are described in the amendment as being the manufacturers of goods, materials and so on. It was a catastrophic disaster. It was unworkable in practice and caused endless problems between subsidiaries and parent companies and between different companies within the same group. It proved totally unworkable. The hon. Lady represents a party which pretends to be ready for Government but which is ready to go back to remedies that failed catastrophically when they were last introduced. That was under a Labour Government—one hardly needs to ask.

I readily concede that the hon. Lady was honest enough to say that there was a great difference between the approach taken by the Government and that of the Opposition to the taxation of business. She accepted that it was part of the Opposition's philosophy to subsidise what they regard as the virtuous part of the economy—those involved in manufacturing—rather than those involved in selling the manufactured goods. I have never understood how there could be a prosperous economy if we discriminated against those who ensured that products were sold but favoured those who produced the product that might or might not be saleable. It is economic nonsense, and it is sad as well as rather frustrating to learn that the Labour party is reviving an old notion which failed so comprehensively.

If the Labour party eventually decided that it had a policy, and if that policy involved a 40 per cent., or substantially higher, investment allowance for manufacturing industry, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary pointed out, it would mean a substantial loss of revenue which would have to be recovered elsewhere through a corporation tax system, heavier Government borrowing, or the imposition of another type of taxation—probably income tax on basic rate taxpayers.

The purpose of the Government's reforms in the 1980s was to achieve lower rates of taxation with fewer allowances against them. Although at the time there was much apprehension about the effect on investment and on the profitability of companies, the reforms were followed

by a substantial increase in investment and in the profitability of companies. The Government's yield from corporation tax rose and the rates of corporation tax could be substantially reduced.

Investment decisions came to be made on the grounds of profitability and of the likely success of the investment in commercial terms rather than on their use as a tax shelter for profits that the company had made and on which it did not want to pay tax. That is what happens if there is a higher rate of tax and many allowances. Yet the hon. Member for Derby, South suggests that we should go back to a system of higher allowances. It is inherent in that system that one would have to have higher rates of taxation. If those were not higher rates of corporation tax, they would be higher rates of taxation on something else. One would bring back a range of distortions in the economy which, thankfully, we have been able to get rid of over the past few years.

On all the fundamental points, the amendment is highly unsatisfactory. It offers to produce a deadweight subsidy of investment that has taken place in the past without any incentive to investment in the future. It does so in a discriminating fashion by picking out arbitrarily certain types of company and favouring them. The Labour party says that it would not be at the expense of others. How can it not be at the expense of others? If one is favoured, someone else will have to pick up the bill. The amendment goes against a system which has been found to be satisfactory in the commercial and industrial worlds over the past few years of getting lower rates of taxation so that companies can take a sensible decision about how they use their cash flow. That is one reason why industry, after the reform of the 1980s, has invested so much more and has made better use of that investment. Investment itself has no merit unless it is properly used. We want to encourage not investment itself but the proper use of investment, which is more important. The Labour party has never been able to understand that.

Industry now needs—and companies in north Hertfordshire tell me that they need this—low inflation, lower interest rates, a stable exchange rate and low taxation. We are already on the way to far lower inflation. There has already been a substantial fall and large falls are still to come throughout the year. Interest rates are already on the way down and have further to fall. The exchange rate mechanism has given a framework of stability in the exchange rate in trading with European partners. The low levels of corporate and personal taxation have increased incentives for efficiency and have given a far better prospect of recovery than we should have had under the old tax system after which the hon. Member for Derby, South and her colleagues hanker.

I hope that the Committee will reject the amendment not only because of the dismal way in which it was moved but because of its major shortcomings of substance. It is rather disgraceful that the Labour party should table an amendment that is so unsatisfactory and so poorly explained.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Chief Secretary to the Treasury cannot draw a great deal of comfort, as he sought to do, from the various surveys that have appeared in recent weeks about business confidence and business prospects. He draws a different message from that drawn by some of the sponsoring bodies. The Confederation of British Industry argued not that its survey fully supported the Chancellor's confidence, but that it was too soon to talk about an early recovery. The surveys show a low level of projected investment following a recent sharp fall in investment. That is a worrying problem. The question that we must address now is whether changes in the corporation tax system can materially affect it and bring about a great improvement. If so, we must ask what kind of change. There is no advantage in denying the scale of the problem or in being unduly optimistic about the speed and scale of the recovery which we all hope to see.

Can changes in the corporation tax regime materially improve industrial investment and investment that will be useful rather than simply induced by tax changes? Clearly, the Government will want to argue that the corporation tax changes in the Budget will have precisely that effect. However, they cannot get away with saying that the changes represent a massive net reduction in the burden on business represented by taxation because they consistently ignore other factors, such as the massive increase in the uniform business rate. When added up, it is a far larger sum than that returned to business by the tax changes in the Budget. By opting to increase the uniform business rate by the largest legally permissible sum—10·9 per cent.—the Government not only put in a figure double their projected rate of inflation, but behaved in the manner for which they criticised local authorities—that is, putting the rates up by more than inflation. The Government have done that on such a scale that the increase greatly outweighs the tax changes.

The increase tends to have an especially severe impact on small business. Some of the small business organisations have been quick to point out the damaging net effect on their financial position of the Budget proposals. The Forum of Private Business has been especially critical on that point, not only because of the uniform business rate, but because of other changes including the funding of sick pay and other liabilities that are landing on business.

We are discussing three categories of change: the Government's proposals, Labour's proposals and our proposals. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) when she moved the amendment. At the end of her speech, I did not understand what Labour intended to do through the amendment. I was helped a little by the Chief Secretary's exposition and then by the hon. Lady's intervention about the technical reasons for the wording of the amendment. It was not clear from the amendment that the increases were included only for the amendment to be in order. Still less was it clear whether the reductions in corporation tax proposed by the Government would also be implemented by the Labour party. That is the crucial hole in the costings. Labour's alternative Budget included proposals for allowances instead of a reduction in the rate of corporation tax. That is part of the amendment. However, the amendment would allow both of those changes to proceed. That may also be for technical reasons. However, it did not become clear whether Labour proposed to retain the reduction in the level of corporation tax. If it does, there is another whole element of costing to find.

Mrs. Beckett: I said clearly and explicitly that we propose to retain the reduction in corporation tax that the Government are instituting. We do not propose to increase it. I had no idea that hon. Members would be so interested

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in the technical details of the amendment. If I had, I should certainly have explained it. We made it clear that the intention was to raise the issue of the choice that arises in the use of specific quantums of resources—between investment allowances and using such resources to cut the tax rate. I thought that I had made it plain. If I did not make it plain to the satisfaction of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I am pleased that he has given me the opportunity to do so now.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Lady still has not made the matter plain. She first said that she intended to keep the reduction and then that we are talking about a given quantum of tax reduction which can be used either for a reduction or for allowances. If I may put the hon. Lady's case for her, it seems that the logic of Labour's position is that it would be better to use the money for allowances than for a reduction in the total rate. The hon. Lady was quite specific in saying that she did not propose to remove the reduction that the Government are introducing, yet she still wishes to argue for allowance changes.

Mr. Mellor: I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman. Tabling a 20-line amendment is a pretty bizarre way in which to raise an issue. The issue could have been raised in a debate on the clause itself.

Mr. Beith: I agree. I took the amendment to be a set of serious proposals because Labour is quite specific in other ways, with which I shall deal later. The Labour party is entitled to propose a wholly different strategy about corporation tax. However, it is still not entirely clear to me whether Labour wants both strategies at the same time, or just one. If it is both at the same time, a lot more money will need to be found from somewhere. It cannot be found through the means specified in Labour's alternative budget. From what the hon. Member for Derby, South said earlier, the figures were not accurate. Indeed, the alternative Budget assumed that £1 billion could be found from closing a loophole on overseas trusts. We estimated that about £500 million could be found from closing that loophole. The Government estimate, although admittedly on a slightly more limited change, a far lower figure, which we shall debate subsequently. The prospect of £1 billion being gained from that change has not materialised in any further discussions. The costings figures are, to put it mildly, in considerable doubt.

6 pm

I argue that there should be a different strategy that is directed towards the fundamental weakness of the corporation tax system—the way in which it is affected by inflation. The strategy should not be based on allowances that are directed towards manufacturing industry. In our alternative Budget we advance the argument that corporation tax allowances should be indexed. That would begin a reform of the corporation tax system. It should be remembered that the corporate tax burden increases as inflation increases. Our proposal would move the system towards neutrality with respect to inflation and provide some further assistance for investment. I submit that it would lead to a better use of resources. I should explain for the avoidance of doubt that I am talking about using the same resources and presenting the indexing of allowances as an alternative to a straight cut in the level of corporation tax. In other words, there would be a different use of the same resources from that proposed by the Government.

I do not believe that the Government's approach leads to resources being used in the most efficient way, either for the promotion of investment or the reform of the tax system. We are talking of the expenditure of £380 million in this tax year. That is a substantial sum which would go most of the way to paying for indexed allowances. The Labour party's alternative is to increase allowances in a way that might help to increase some manufacturing investment. At 40 per cent. the allowances would be so high that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some unnecessary or misdirected investment would arise. I am still unconvinced that we can readily separate manufacturing from other valuable forms of industrial investment.

Is it always better to build machines rather than to provide services? Is that always a better allocation of investment resources? I am not convinced that it is. Why should someone who proposes to make an investment in inland waterways to provide a better and more environmentally friendly form of transport have that investment regarded as less suitable to attract allowances than an investment in manufacturing output?

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): To take up the hon. Gentleman's example, it is not possible to clean out inland waterways in the absence of the appropriate machinery. The service sector often depends on the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Beith: Both sectors are interdependent. If the system is neutral as between manufacturing and services, both areas can benefit from allowances at the same level. It seems a roundabout way of encouraging inland waterways to hope that a certain form of manufacturing will develop in the United Kingdom rather than elsewhere and to tilt the allowances in that direction. Why should specialised maintenance be excluded from the benefit of investment allowances when it may be crucial to maintaining industrial competitiveness? It is said that there is a proper distinction, but that case has not been made out.

Reforming the corporation tax system so that it is not affected by inflation by indexing depreciation allowances would give some incentive to increasing investment as a long-term principle. We would build into the tax system something that would last into the future and something that would be predictable in its impact. It would not produce a very short-term high level of investment. I do not imagine that the Labour party envisaged a 40 per cent. level of allowance lasting indefinitely—I assume that it sees it as a short-term boost to investment. Perhaps it would be a longer-term boost, but it would not survive all Governments into the future. A reform of the system that would be likely to last would be a continuing and predictable guide to investment decisions for the future and one that would lead to a more suitable use of resources.

The way in which inflation affects the corporate tax system should be underlined. The tax base increases with inflation through stock depreciation. When the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) introduced the 1984 changes that got rid of stock relief, I think that he felt that he was in the process of driving inflation out of the system.

If he had been able to predict the rates of inflation that we have experienced since then, perhaps he would not have been so ready to get rid of stock relief at that time.

The annual writing down allowances are based on historic cost rather than current cost. Thus inflation reduces the real value of the allowances and the tax base increases with inflation. A recent paper produced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies was the result of an attempt to quantify the factors that I have outlined and others in the United Kingdom economy. It used a sample of 750 firms and estimated that if inflation remained constant at 10 per cent.—heaven forbid—from 1990 to 1993, corporate tax liabilities would be one third higher in 1993 than they would be if inflation was at zero. The effect of 10 per cent. inflation on the tax system would be to raise the cost of capital by 2 per cent. above its cost with zero inflation. The paper concludes that almost all the corporation tax bias against investment at current inflation rates results from the inflation non-neutralities in the present tax system. That is the use of horrible jargon, but there is a strong argument for getting rid of the effect of inflation on the corporation tax system.

Firms are hit extremely hard during times of high inflation. Interest rates go high and the Government squeeze the economy. It seems the least appropriate time during which to increase the corporation tax burden.

In that context, I raise another issue in the hope that the Government will give it further thought. I wonder why the Government still have not dealt with the problems of unrelieved advance corporation tax. It is still a fault in the tax system. Unrelieved advance corporation tax hits especially export-earning companies with a high proportion of overseas earnings that do not have mainstream corporation tax against which to set the advance corporation tax that they have already paid. That is another area of corporation tax reform on which the Government could engage.

The extent to which corporation tax can induce the sort of investment that we want in industry can be exaggerated. The decisions that we take on this part of the Finance Bill will not achieve a great turnround in investment. The decisions that we take could distort the pattern of investment, especially if our approach were loaded too much in a particular direction. Perhaps the most useful service that we could perform would be to make the system more neutral in respect of inflation and to ensure that it provided a predictable basis on which companies could plan for the future. They could then make investment decisions without the fear that they are dependent on incentives that might quickly be withdrawn or that they will be undermined by a pattern of taxation that is distorted by inflation.

Mr. Tim Smith: I was very interested in what the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said about unrelieved advance corporation tax. There is a problem, and it is one that we should address. Indeed, it is a major problem for many of Britain's most successful companies that have major overseas investments. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. As we are talking of a tax issue that has major economic implications —it is not an arcane point—it could well be taken up by the Committee at some stage. It is a complex but extremely important issue that bears serious consideration.

When I first read the amendment, I struggled to understand its implications. I thought that it might be the Labour party's contribution to tax simplification. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said that the object of the exercise was merely to raise an issue. Surely she could have tabled an amendment that proposed that capital allowances should be increased from 25 per cent. to 40 per cent. for one year. We would all have understood what she meant. As has already been said, the amendment is wholly retrospective. The financial year 1990 has finished, and there can be no question of encouraging new investment. The amendment would merely produce a windfall gain for companies that have already invested.

Mrs. Beckett: This is becoming incredibly tedious. The amendment has to be retrospective for it to be in order. The clause refers only to the rate of corporation tax for the coming year. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the amendment was the simplest way that we could find of raising the issue. We wanted to ensure that it was not technically defective. If we had tabled a technically defective amendment, would Conservative Members have spent all their time saying that it was a shame that the Opposition were unable to produce anything but technically defective amendments?

Mr. Smith: I am happy to deal with the merits of the amendment; I shall leave aside the technicalities. I shall merely say that it would have been better to seek to amend the following clause, which deals with next year's corporation tax rates.

What is the most effective way of encouraging increased investment? Can we do it best by introducing increased capital allowances? I suggest that there has been some falling away from the record levels of investment that we saw in 1986, 1987 and 1988 because of a reduction in corporate profitability as a result of the recession.

Much the most important source of investment funds in the United Kingdom is retained profit, not borrowings or new equity investment and certainly not extra tax reliefs. The great thing about the 1980s was the huge increase in profitability in British industry and the ability of industry not only to distribute more and pay more to the taxman but to retain more in the company and invest more. That has been the main source of increased investment in the past few years.

The encouraging news is that it is forecast that next year and in 1993 we shall see a resurgence of profitability in British industry. Therefore, we can reasonably assume that we shall also see a resurgence of investment. Indeed, when one talks to people in business, they do not all say that they have cancelled their investment programme. They say that they have deferred their investment decisions as a result of the uncertainties brought about by the recession and the loss of business confidence.

It is not possible to continue deferring investment decisions for ever. For example, if a company has a programme of replacing its vehicles, whether company cars or its commercial fleet, it cannot defer the decision to invest for ever. It becomes more expensive in terms of repairs and maintenance to do so. Eventually, the company must make a decision to invest. Many investment decisions have been deferred. Companies are

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simply waiting for the restoration of confidence. When that happens, we shall undoubtedly see a resurgence of investment and profitability.

Whether the tax system can encourage a resurgence of investment is a side show. We need to have a corporation tax profit which is as close as possible to the accounting profit. That is important because otherwise there are distortions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) referred to what happens when such distortions occur. I remember what happened because I had the misfortune to work in industry when we had a Labour Government from 1974 to 1979. At that time, people would work out the profit at the end of the year and calculate the tax of 52 per cent. Then they would say, "Hang on a second—if we make some more investment or bring forward some investment decisions, we can obtain 100 per cent. allowances." Decisions were not made on their merits or because it was a sensible commercial investment and the timing was right; they were made for tax reasons, and I cannot think of a worse reason for making an investment decision.

There is a distinction to be made between the quantity of investment and the quality of investment. It is not sufficient simply to seek more investment. We have already heard about what happened in eastern Europe, where many countries had record levels of investment but appallingly bad productivity and output.

It is important to have a tax system that does not encourage people to make decisions for the wrong reasons. I supported the changes made in the Budget of 1984. The Confederation of British Industry was not happy about those changes. It was a radical change from a 52 per cent. rate of corporation tax with high allowances and stock relief to a 35 per cent. rate of tax and lower allowances. The CBI was worried about what would happen. I remember the representations that were made to Back-Bench Members about those changes. However, the Treasury was right to make those changes. They were the right ones and we have seen a huge growth in investment, profitability and, until recently, the corporation tax take since the changes were made seven years ago.

In both the corporation tax and personal tax systems, we should have—and we now have—as broad as possible a tax base and as few reliefs as possible. That is the most sensible way to proceed. As I said, it is also important that the corporation tax profit should be as near as possible to the accounting profit. I say that not merely because it is neat to do it that way, but because, in accountancy terms, the object of depreciation is to amortise the cost of an asset over its useful life. That is not easy. It involves subjectivity. There is room for differences of opinion about the rights and wrongs of it.

It is not possible for the tax system to follow accounts exactly—we must have some form of arbitrary rule—but 25 per cent. on a written-down basis reflects the way in which assets are generally used. The only worry—I dare say that it is an important one—was raised by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. It is what happens when there is inflation. As soon as there is any inflation in the system, one has a problem. It then costs considerably more in money terms to replace assets than it did to acquire them in the first place.

It is better to focus on developing tax policies which bring inflation down rather than policies which accommodate and institutionalise inflation. I should be wary of doing that. Even though there are some distortions, it is probably better to stick with the historic cost accounting approach and attempt to bring inflation down. It would not be sensible to pursue the proposal in the amendment, apparently at a cost of £200 million to the Exchequer this year. The hon. Member for Derby, South has produced no evidence that the proposal would produce the investment that the country needs, so I hope that the Committee will reject the amendment.

6.15 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies: We have had several nit-picking speeches from Conservative Members, from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury downwards—or upwards. I had hoped that we were seeing some change of attitude in the Tory party to manufacturing industry. However, that did not come out in any of the speeches that we heard tonight.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) had tabled an amendment to give a tax subsidy, as the right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) called it, or tax allowance to banks, stockbrokers or property companies, to encourage the purchase of shares by individual persons, to encourage personal equity plans, business expansion schemes or, indeed, employee share ownership schemes or to further any of the other items of fiscal engineering that the Government have undertaken, we should have heard loud guffaws of approval from the Conservative Benches. But instead the amendment seeks to encourage manufacturing industry.

The attitude of Conservative Members to the amendment confirms the deep-seated hostility to manufacturing industry in the Tory party, or at least the modern Tory party since 1974. I have observed that attitude carefully from the Opposition Benches and from the Government Benches for a long time. It came out again in the nit-picking speeches that we heard this afternoon. The hostility goes back 12 years. Some of us were on these Benches or the Benches opposite during the last 12 years and before.

In 1977, 1978 and 1979, the Labour Government sought to introduce measures to improve our manufacturing industry. Those measures were not only opposed but treated with contempt and derision by the Tory Opposition Treasury team. Yet in 1979, we had a surplus in our trade in manufactured goods. The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North called the years of the Labour Government the years of failure. I suggest that they were the years of success. The balance of trade is the only indicator of success for the manufacturing sector. Manufactured goods are the only tradable commodity across the exchanges.

We now have the years of failure. Last year, we had a £16 billion deficit in our manufacturing trade, despite our wonderful corporation tax system, which is supposed to be far better than that of Germany or France. Yet Germany and France managed to have a surplus in manufacturing trade, while we have managed only a deficit under the Tory Government.

I remember that, in 1979, when Lord Joseph became Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, one of the first things he did was to take away investment grants, which helped small companies in the regions. Then he whittled

away at the selective employment regions, the development areas and all the assistance that has been given to the regions, mainly to manufacturing industry. Regional Britain was then, and to some extent still is, manufacturing Britain.

Across the road at Great George street, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) was doing his bit to destroy huge chunks of British manufacturing industry. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said, the right hon. and learned Gentleman increased VAT to 15 per cent. Some people forget that he also introduced a massive increase in the price of gas and electricity to British industry and removed what were in effect subsidies. The subsidies should have been removed eventually over a period, but it was done all in one year.

I had a private electric arc furnace steel works in my constituency. The Tory Government of 1981 managed to wipe out most of Britain's private steel-making capacity, certainly in special steels, with 15 per cent. VAT, high interest rates, a high pound and a massive increase in the price of energy, especially gas and electricity, on which those industries were dependent. Altogether, 25 per cent. of our manufacturing base was wiped out between 1980 and 1982 by the policies of the Conservative Government, who had no interest in manufacturing industry.

Why were the Government hostile to manfacturing industry? There were three reasons: first, because the strength of the trade union movement lay in manufacturing industry, so anything that weakened it was good and if it had to be weakened, so be it; secondly, they had contempt for regional assistance because the regions were the basis of manufacturing industry; thirdly, there was the influence of what is euphemistically described as the radical right—that collection of loonies, mad economists, mad theorists and third-rate financiers we see on television from time to time—who influenced policy so much in the past 12 years. They had no interest in manufacturing industry and no concern for the balance of payments. They believed in letting the market decide everything.

The trouble is that the market in Britain will always gravitate to service industries. We are not against service industries, property development or commercial development, but because of our banking and financial system, the bias has always been to service industries. Some attempt must be made to redraw the balance to manufacturing industry.

The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) believed in what is called fiscal neutrality—removing all allowances and a lower rate of tax. That increased benefits to service industries, which did not have to spend money on investment, but had a deleterious effect on our manufacturing industry.

That is one reason for the decline in our balance of trade in the past four or five years, but the then Chancellor was not prepared to help manufacturing industry because it did not fit with the political aims of the Tory party. Manufacturing industry is now a small sector of our economy. The Tory hinterland—the south-east—is almost entirely dependent on "highly geared" service industries, which is a euphemism for them being up to their eyeballs in debt.

The property-owning democracy is up to its eyeballs in debt. High interest rates are damaging the hinterland of the Tory party, but apparently they are the only way of reducing inflation. In the next few years, it will be interesting to see whether the south takes the same attitude to inflation as it did in the past. It was easy to preach against inflation and to say that the only way of reducing it was a recession, which largely did not affect the south of England. I think that the Chief Secretary realises that things are changing: the recession is affecting the south of England, and the fight against inflation is creating unemployment there. I wonder whether we shall hear the same cries against inflation as we heard in the past.

It was easy to talk about wanting to reduce inflation when the recession mainly affected the regions, but now the Government are extremely worried about rising unemployment in the south-east. That is why there will be electoral difficulties in the autumn, as there are now, and at the beginning of next year if the Prime Minister does not call an election until then.

The Government have shown that they are not interested in manufacturing industry. They will find every reason not to help it, but Britain will survive only with a strong manufacturing sector. Jobs in banking and the property sector will not increase in the next five years. Where will all the good people of the south-east who have been laid off find work? They will not find it in banking, finance, retail distribution, pensions or insurance. The boom in the City in the past 10 years will not be repeated.

The Government should change their attitudes, because the only way of reducing our balance of payments and the only way in which Britain can grow, live and pay its way again is through the manufacturing sector. Perhaps the Chief Secretary should rethink, and at least start tonight with the amendment.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I am sorry to have to disagree with the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), for whom I have enormous admiration and respect. I remember debating the Development Land Tax Bill in 1976 with him night after night. In those days, he could at least recognise a philosophical divide when he saw one. There has been no nit-picking by Conservative Members, but there is a division on what makes proper investment work.

There is no question of Conservative Members disliking manufacturing industry. In the past 10 years, output in manufacturing industry has been rising and rising and recently reached a peak. Contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman suggested, because of the way in which we have geared incentives, manufacturing industry has been encouraged and Britain has been the recipient of vast foreign investment, notably in the automobile industry and other advanced industries. One need only drive up and down motorways to realise that manufacturing estates have been transformed in recent times.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman said, if I heard him correctly, that manufacturing output has been rising and rising under the Government. I am sorry to have to tell him that it fell dramatically in 1980 and did not recover from the figure that was inherited in 1979 until 1988. It increased in 1988, 1989 and 1990 but is falling again. That is not the same as saying that there has been a dramatic increase in manufacturing investment throughout that period.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Lady will confirm that manufacturing output recently reached a peak. Of course there have been ups and downs and cycles, but under this Government it reached a peak. The issue is what makes

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efficient investment that creates a return, which must relate to the marketplace and not to some policy on the tax system.

The amendment is classic Labour party dogma and seems extremely muddled. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) tried to defend it and said that the fact that the amendment would increase corporation tax more than will the Bill is purely technical. We must accept that it is purely technical, but my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary was justified in saying that the amendment might be a taste of things to come.

6.30 pm

My problem when listening to Labour spokesmen on economic matters is that I find that what they say is utterly incredible. I do not believe what they say. I am prepared to accept and understand that they have a dogmatic position which we can oppose and debate. My problem is in assessing whether there is any meaning in what they say. Over the past few years Labour spokesmen have been extremely bad at putting their case across. Their policies do not add up—not just in the mathematical sense, but because there is no logic behind them.

There is an alternative way of looking at what the amendment would do. One can accept the point about the cost of capital and listen to what the Labour party says about it and about interest rates—interest rates are a relevant alternative way of encouraging investment, which we all accept is needed—but the Labour party's position on interest rates was originally determined in 1987-89. The Labour party talked about how the Government ran an overheated economy, yet when interest rates were low and when, in retrospect, there was a case for raising them and having a tighter monetary policy, the Labour party was pressing for lower interest rates. That must not be forgotten.

More recently, some of us have believed for some time that interest rates should be lower. The Labour party, far from recognising the relationship between exchange rate policy and interest rates, was pressing for and goading us into entry into the European exchange rate mechanism, which has been perhaps the major constraint on interest rate policy. The same people who were pressing for lower interest rates pressed for entry into the ERM, which has been a major constraint on the cost of capital—one might even argue that it has been the factor in continuing the high underlying costs of investment. Therefore, they are the least able now to argue for lower interest rates and lower costs of capital as alternatives.

Anything that the Labour party says on macro-economic policy is distinctly incredible and questionable. Nothing adds up, except when Labour Members come to the House on occasions such as this and propose the classic Labour dogmatic positions which, as my hon. Friends have said, have been debased and debunked for many years.

If one considers trade policy and the effect on our balance of payments, and if one considers investment and all those matters with which both sides of the House are concerned, one cannot ignore the cost of capital or interest rates.

What has struck me—I was saying this even when I was a Minister last September—has been the Treasury's difficulty under all Governments for many years in recognising the lags that exist. This involves not just the old analogy of the tanker taking a long time to change direction; it is much more complicated than that. The lags are complicated. It is not just a question of the lag between a change in interest rates and a change in confidence—I hope and pray that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary is correct that confidence is now returning; there is a lag between a major change in interest rates and confidence. There is also a lag between a change in confidence and actual investment, and one between actual investment and employment. Then there is the effect of a change in employment on politics and voting intentions, which we, as politicians, cannot discount. Different people calculate that those lags stretch for long periods ahead. It has been calculated that some lags stretch two or three years ahead.

The amendment is nonsense. It is a typical Labour amendment, representative of the old-fashioned thinking in which Labour Members engage. It does not address the fundamental issue, which is the need both to reintroduce general incentives to investment and to lower the cost of capital which is vastly greater in this country than in Japan, West Germany or the United States. If we are anxious to be competitive, as we all are, my right hon. and learned Friend and his team are absolutely correct to head towards lower interest rates. I hope that the interest rate structure will be determined by the real interests of this economy and not by considerations which relate to the German economy, for example, to name but one.

Mr. Battle: We are entitled to ask the Government why they are so resistant to proposals to support the manufacturing base of our economy. Behind the generalised comments on our amendments lies a deep hostility, in some cases, even to analysing the economy into the manufacturing and service sectors and to considering what is happening within those different sectors. One hon. Member refused to acknowledge that there were any differentials between the sectors of the economy. There is a case for tilting the structure of the Budget towards supporting manufacturing industry rather than allowing it to continue to decline.

During the past 13 years the Government have practically consigned our manufacturing base to history. Not far from where I live a famous textile mill was refurbished and turned into the Armley Industrial museum. A working textile loom, industrial engineering and textile machinery can be seen there. The only experience of manufacturing that the children of the future will have will be in that industrial museum. My constituency was built on textiles, clothing and engineering, but employment in those industries and that economic base have been completely eroded.

Since the early 1980s, 2 million manufacturing jobs have been lost. That is the erosion that I am talking about. We were told that it was a slimming down to make manufacturing leaner and fitter. We even had the celebrated remark of Lord Young that the manufacturing base did not matter and the economy would boom if only more people would eat out. We know that we cannot run an economy simply on the service sector and eating out.

Even now manufacturing accounts for just over one fifth of total United Kingdom output. It is down from a third in the mid-1970s, yet the Confederation of British Industry now expects a further 300,000 jobs to be lost in

manufacturing by the end of 1992. Our balance of trade depends on manufacturing. Four fifths of United Kingdom exports are factory-made goods.

There is a catch. Ian Thompson, the chief economist at the Engineering Employers Federation, claims that a large part of the increase in exports over the past few years is represented by the assembly or repackaging of imported manufactured goods, particularly in high value areas, such as advanced electronic equipment. He says:

"My contention is that the United Kingdom manufacturing sector will not be big enough to support the kind of expanding economy that we need in the 1990s."

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): If the hon. Gentleman considers what people, particularly those at Bradford university and elsewhere, were saying 15 years ago about work practices, he will realise that they projected a shrinkage in manufacturing employment and an increase in service sector employment. That has come about. That prediction is taking place alongside the improvement in productivity. It was likely to take place, and it has nothing to do with Governments. It is related to automation and other such matters.

Mr. Battle: We were also told that manufacturing job losses would be replaced by service sector jobs. However, we find that those replacement jobs are part time, temporary and even lower paid. The myth is still perpetuated, however, that low pay is the cause of unemployment in areas of highest unemployment. Each week I return from the House to my constituency and hear announcements of hundreds of redundancies in manufacturing firms there—GKN Axles in Kirkstall, Doncaster Monkbridge Steel Stockholdings, Pennine Castings and, last week, Howson Algraphy which announced 340 redundancies. That is the scale of the erosion of the manufacturing base.

People suggest that it is just the service sector in the south-east that has been affected. The fact is that the economy is being undermined everywhere, not just in the south-east. The Government's economic policies are making manufacturing in constituencies such as mine in the north practically anorexic. They are being starved to death. They are also being starved of investment by high interest rates. Furthermore, they are being starved of the training back-up that they need. Now they are being belted by the uniform business rate.

The CBI forecasts that the projected fall in manufacturing investment this year will continue. It forecasts that it will fall by a further 17 per cent., after a 5 per cent. decline last year. In his Budget statement the Chancellor said that investment would fall by 10 per cent. in 1991. Manufacturing order books are lower than they have been for 40 years. In that context, the Government ought to take seriously the plea that the manufacturing base should be supported. It should not perpetuate the shibboleth and myth of the past—that the service sector will save our economy.

Our amendment is a small measure that I hoped the Government would support. It would provide a lifeline to manufacturing industry. It would not damn it and consign it to history textbooks.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I find the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) far more revealing of her own state of mind and that of the modern Labour party than she perhaps can have imagined when she tabled it. It enshrines, in a particularly striking and transparent way, two of the more antique economic illusions to be found in the modern world. I am aware that they were nurtured in the bosom of the British Labour party for generations after they had been abandoned elsewhere in the western world. However, I thought that in its new, reformed guise the British Labour party would have abandoned them.

The first of those illusions is the belief that, somehow, manufacturing is more virtuous than any other form of economic activity. I seem to remember that there is a passage in Marshall's "Principles of Economics" about how pervasive but mistaken is the idea that, whereas the maker of furniture performs a socially useful function, the man who markets and distributes it does not. When that book was published in 1890 I imagine that many people were victims of that apparently seductive illusion, but that book which, as you know, Sir Paul, stands at the beginning of modern economic teaching, was published 101 years ago. Therefore, it is remarkable to find that members of the Opposition Front Bench in the House of Commons today are still perpetuating that illusion. I am sure that Marshall would have been extremely surprised had he ever reflected upon the fact that that might be the case.

Some forms of economic activity are more useful than others and provide a better return on capital employed. Some may add more value. Others—at particular stages, at least—may show a greater rate of growth than others. There is no correlation between those criteria and manufacturing. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) has already referred to a number of service industries that have a very high added value attached to them and that have enjoyed much faster growth rates than many manufacturing sectors.

It is completely wrong, for example, to suppose that software is an activity that is less inherently economically viable than the production of hardware. The two are closely related, but at various times it may be that the software produces far greater value for society. I hope, therefore, that we can lay that myth to rest for the rest of the debate on the clause and for the remainder of the Committee proceedings.

The other illusion that, apparently, is still dear to the heart of the Labour party is that investment is an end in itself—that, somehow, it is an inherently virtuous activity that should be pursued simply for its own ends. Nothing could be more destructive or more damaging to good, sound economic policy than that illusion, attractive though I know it still is to many Labour Members.

One of the most fundamental economic decisions that a society collectively takes, whether consciously or not, relates to what portion of its current output should be invested, what proportion of the harvest should be set aside as seed corn and what proportion of it should be consumed. There is no point, however, in forgoing present consumption unless the return from the investment will be worth more than the consumption that is currently forgone, otherwise the welfare of that society will not be enhanced; it will be diminished. Over time, that society will be poorer, not wealthier.

If one wants to consider an example of how it is possible to impoverish a society by forced investment—by investment that yields a negative return, a return that is less than the value of the investment—one needs only to look at the examples in eastern Europe that have come to light so dramatically over the past year or two.

6.45 pm

Mr. Hind: Does not my hon. Friend think that it is important to balance a consumer purchasing something, which maximises the investment and creates wealth, against the idea that the investment itself will benefit society? The Opposition would increase the amount of taxation that is levied upon the better off. Their argument is that investment should be increased. However, they would take away the very means of increasing investment, whether it be through savings, insurance policies or bank savings. They believe that consumers would spend more, but consumers would not have more money to spend because they would be paying more tax into the state's coffers. Their economic argument does not seem to stand up in any circumstances.

Mr. Davies: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I have at heart in my remarks—as I am sure do all hon. Members—the interests of society and the country as a whole. If a firm is induced by tax incentives to make an investment that does not, in real resource terms, yield a positive return, it may be compensated by the tax advantage that induced the firm to make the investment in the first place; but that compensation is at the expense of society as a whole. If one takes the aggregate of the resources available to society and looks at what is done with them, one finds that a proportion of them has been lost and thrown away. They have been put into what is called an investment, but the consequence of that investment is not the same resources being available for future consumption as would have been available if the investment had not taken place. They amount to less. That must be a madhouse.

It may be that the Opposition have not thought this through thoroughly. If they adopted the policy of trying to push firms into making investments that on commercial criteria, against a neutral tax system, they would not have made, they would steadily reduce the marginal return on investment. Once the marginal return on investment became negative, which would eventually happen, society would be greatly impoverished. Therefore, I urge the Opposition to turn to any good textbook that has been written since Marshall so that the future deliberations of our Committee can be relieved of some of these antique illusions.

Mr. Mellor: The attendance in the debate has been small but the speeches made in it have been of a high quality. We have had a number of frisky contributions. I shall restrict my speech because I sense an enthusiasm in the Committee to move on to other matters.

To make up for an oversight last week, when I should have said what I say now, may I say how pleased I am to see the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) here. He was an opponent of mine at two elections, and we had our disagreements. However, I wish him all good fortune and I hope that he will enjoy his time here. It says a lot for his diligence that he is sitting through debates on the Finance Bill. I am not sure whether one would recommend it as a good way to start.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): It is a reward.

Mr. Mellor: I think that one would have demanded a recount if one had known that that was in store.

I particularly enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), as well as those from a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, particularly of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart). All referred to the threadbare nature of the amendment. It is clear that everyone agrees with clause 22, which reduces corporation tax. I am not sure how convincing anyone, apart from her most devoted supporters, found the attempt by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to add to the clause an ill-focused return to investment allowances. The proposal was put before us without any definition of what kind of investment the allowances would be given to, or of the period for which they would be given, or whether they would be retrospective, or how far in the future they would go.

Given the sensitivity of costing and fiscal proof, it was astonishing that the hon. Lady was unable to offer—perhaps she will in winding up—any estimate of how much all this will cost. Our estimate is that it will be £200 million. Notwithstanding what the amendment says, it is apparently not her intention that this will be obtained from corporation tax. It is an interesting figure floating around. I return to the point that the number of sources for increased taxation that the Labour party is ruling out makes it likely that the poor old chap on the standard rate of income tax will have to bear the brunt of these changes. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that having taken the trouble to table a 20-line amendment, the Opposition cannot be more precise on these points. As attention increasingly focuses on what they propose to do rather than on what we have done and are proposing to do, I doubt whether the comparison will be to their advantage. We could not afford to make proposals anything like as threadbare as these.

I also find misconceived the assumption that there is something especially good about investment in manufacturing that is not so good about investment in other commercial activities. Britain must have a strong manufacturing base and nothing that I say belittles that need. Apparent in a number of the speeches from the Opposition was a hankering to go back to the days of L. S. Lowry. The idea is that, now that Britain no longer has L. S. Lowry-type landscapes, we have lost something. I wonder whether that is the forward-looking policy that we should be hearing.

I have said before, but it bears repeating, that, increasingly, as the Opposition shed some of the neo-Trotskyism of the early 1980s, we are left with sad, old glimpses of the policies of Callaghan and Wilson. There is not much evidence of the Opposition coming to terms with the modern British economy. That was particularly evident in the disparaging observations about banks made by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies).

What are we to say about the differentials between investments? I happen to have the figures for the size of the financial services sector. I recently had an engagement with part of that sector and it has stuck in my mind. The sector is responsible for 20 per cent. of our gross domestic product and 12 per cent. of employment. It is a buoyant sector in which employment has increased by 60 per cent. since 1980. It contributes £9 billion to our invisible earnings, but it is to be regarded as a kind of second-class activity, in comparison to manufacturing, which is to be the subject of tax breaks. These have been presented to the House in nothing more than an ill-focused attempt to curry favour with one or two sectors of industry that still look back to the old days of stock allowances and

investment allowances. However, most of industry, certainly as represented by its associations, has moved away from this and now recognises that, in the end, we want a competitive economy with low direct taxation rates, which leaves those who run industry free to make their decisions rather than having those decisions made for them, or distorted, by Whitehall. On that basis, I hope that the Committee will reject the amendment and, when it comes to it, endorse clause 22.

Mrs. Beckett: I can honestly say that this has been one of the most peculiar debates that it has ever been my privilege to attend. It is peculiar partly because of the extraordinary nit-picking way—my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) was right—in which the Government have approached the wording of this modest amendment. It is designed to raise the issue of the choice, which would be open to any Government, between giving help and support to industry through cuts in the rate of tax or through something like investment allowances. I made it plain from the outset that this was the purpose of the amendment, and it is extraordinary that there should be so much concern about the wording of the amendment. I have not had the privilege of serving on a Committee with the Chief Secretary, but on the Committees on which I had the privilege of serving I found that the Government, on dozens of occasions, got the drafting of the Bill wrong. Despite the criticism, the Government do not seem to be able to find any defects in the wording of the amendment, which is odd.

As for the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I am not surprised that the Minister enjoyed his speech, but I shall scrutinise his amendments with the care that he devoted to scrutinising ours. As his amendments are nearly always defective or out of order, it was foolish of him to stray into this territory.

Mr. Mellor: I assure the hon. Lady, because I am only too well aware of the technical defects of drafting—I dare say that I shall have to confess to a few upstairs—that that was not my point. My point, and that of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, was that I could not understand why the amendment applied only to manufacturing and not to other forms of investment and that I wanted to know who it covered and how much it would cost. These are points of substance, not technical points.

Mrs. Beckett: I am about to address these points. I was dealing first with the technical points made by the Minister and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, among others. These are cash flow measures, not net changes from the point of view of spending over a period of years.

The Chief Secretary put his finger on the most important issue that has been raised—whether or not greater priority should be given to investment in the manufacturing sector. The Chief Secretary chided the Opposition and asked why we considered the manufacturing sector to be so important, and why we did not encourage all kinds of investment, no matter in what sector it is made. I am prepared to admit that there is more worth in investment in manufacturing industry, making goods that we can sell elsewhere to earn our living, than in a few more car parks and casinos. If the Government do not think that such investment is preferable—judging from what they have said, they plainly do not—I am delighted to get that on the record.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I do not have time.

In his opening speech, the Chief Secretary talked about how wonderful it was that corporation tax was lower in this country than in Germany, France or Italy and that the tax burden on companies was lower here than in Germany, France, Italy and other countries.

The total tax burden on companies here is lower than that in France, lower than that in Germany and lower than that in Italy. Anyone listening to the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have thought that we had a more successful record than Germany, France and Italy. Anyone would have thought that, given this wonderful incentive, companies here had invested more and that, in some way, this refuted the appalling and frightening statistics showing our decline in manufacturing output, the decline in our share of manufacturing trade and the other very considerable difficulties that we face.

7 pm

In his response to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the Chief Secretary talked about investment having fallen off from a historic high. For a moment I thought that he, like my hon. Friend and, indeed, myself, was referring to the levels that had been inherited from a Labour Government in 1979. If he was, clearly he realised his mistake, as he hastily began to talk, instead, about the peak of investment in 1988-89. There is no doubt that, by 1988-89, investment had returned to the levels of 1979, just as, unfortunately, investment is now going back to the levels of the 1960s. The Chief Secretary referred to an investment level of about £11 billion—I think that the reference was to last year—but he will know that the same statistics show that the level is expected to fall this year. The figure may go below £9 billion; it will certainly go below £10 billion. That is the situation with which we are seeking to cope and our amendments are intended, in a minor way, to rectify it.

From the rate of corporation tax, the Chief Secretary turned to other rates of taxation and to proposals that the shadow Chancellor discussed this weekend. I assume that his reference to a tax level of 59p in the pound related to our proposal for the very top slice of income—not the level at which the current 40p rate applies. He mentioned our proposal to lift the ceiling on national insurance contributions. This would bring our tax level, first of all, back to the level of income tax alone two to three years ago, which is very similar to that being charged in competitor countries. Despite that fact, the Chief Secretary suggested that what we propose might lead to a brain drain. He does not seem to be aware of the fact that we have a brain drain already. We are losing some of the most intelligent and well-educated people—the people whose inventions and discoveries form the basis of so much manufacturing prosperity. Thanks to cuts in the Government's support for research and development, and to their overall attitude to investment, those people are simply unable to work here. Often with the utmost reluctance, they take their brains and their ideas—together with the prosperity that can result from their patents and inventions—to competitor countries.

The Chief Secretary, once challenged, was gracious enough to acknowledge that, under the present Government, the tax burden on the average family has

[Mrs. Beckett]

risen. It would have been only fair to point out that, for families on average or below-average earnings, the benefits derived from the income tax cuts have been almost exactly offset by increases in national insurance contributions. Indeed, they have been extinguished by value added tax increases—even those before the most recent one—and by the poll tax, for which the Government refuse to give us a breakdown in terms of its impact on the incomes of people on average or below-average earnings.

The Chief Secretary's remarks on those points were most interesting. He seemed to imply some deception on our part, but we have made our taxation proposals very plain, which is more than can be said for the Government. The Prime Minister—then Chancellor of the Exchequer—spoke last year to the Welsh Tories at their party conference. No doubt it was a small gathering. In that speech he attacked some of Labour's taxation proposals. For example, he said:

"They intend to meddle with mortgage interest relief"

—in other words, not to allow mortgage interest relief at the top rate of tax. As long ago as July, the Prime Minister was very upset about that. Although we had clearly told the country what we proposed, the Government attacked us. Then, of course, they put it in their own Budget. On the same occasion, the right hon. Gentleman attacked the Labour party for its intention to freeze the married couple's allowance. That, too, is in this Budget—again without notice from the Conservative party. If the Chief Secretary wants to use this occasion to give us a categorical undertaking that at no point will the Government follow through the logic of their decision to charge employers' national insurance contributions on the full range of earnings, and that they will never lift the ceiling on earnings on which employees pay national insurance contributions, I shall be happy to give way. If he is not prepared to do so, we must all recognise the likelihood that the Government will follow through the logic of their decision. Just as with the married couple's allowance, and with mortgage interest relief at 40p in the pound, they do not propose to tell the electorate in advance of their decisions. Yet they complain about our proposals.

As was identified by the Chief Secretary in his closing remarks, the main point is whether and how we should give support to industry. Should assistance be given to all by way of cuts in the rate of corporation tax, or should there be a specifically targeted incentive for manufacturing? We certainly prefer the latter. The Chief Secretary drew attention to some costings that he suggested might be possible in respect of the proposal for investment allowances. I am happy to repeat something that I made quite plain in my opening remarks. The Government were prepared to forgo quantifiable amounts of revenue by allowing cuts in tax rates. We would have used that revenue to help manufacturing industry through investment allowances. Let me quote what the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said about that choice:

"The current tax system acts as a disincentive to investment."

The CBI said that members still believe that investment in allowances for depreciation of plant and machinery is the most important priority. This is precisely the proposal that is contained in our amendment.

That brings me to what, apart from what one could almost describe as the Government's attacks on manufacturing industry, is the most extraordinary feature of the debate. The Chief Secretary rose magnificently above one of the points that I made in my earlier remarks—that this was the proposal of the CBI and others. The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) said that this was an incredible proposal which showed the Labour party's old-fashioned thinking. The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) referred to it as an antique illusion. The Chief Secretary said that such a proposal was clung to by the members of a disaffected section of the business community, of whom there were not all that many. Those were fascinating remarks from Conservative Members. I propose to send copies of them to the Engineering Employers Federation, the CBI and many other representatives of manufacturing industry, all of whom, as Conservative Members know are calling for precisely those steps.

There could be no better example of the arrogance of the Government than the way in which, yet again, they claim to know what industry wants better than does industry itself. They do not listen to anyone but themselves, and they have made it plain that they never will. That is one of the reasons why they are on their way out, and in the next Budget we shall be able to introduce measures of this kind.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 169, Noes 264.

Division No. 138] **[7.9 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Doran, Frank
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Duffy, A. E. P.
Allen, Graham	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Armstrong, Hilary	Eadie, Alexander
Ashton, Joe	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Fatchett, Derek
Barron, Kevin	Faulds, Andrew
Battle, John	Fisher, Mark
Beckett, Margaret	Flannery, Martin
Bell, Stuart	Flynn, Paul
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Foster, Derek
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Foulkes, George
Bermingham, Gerald	Fraser, John
Blair, Tony	Fyfe, Maria
Blunkett, David	Galloway, George
Boyes, Roland	Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Golding, Mrs Llin
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Gordon, Mildred
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Gould, Bryan
Buckley, George J.	Graham, Thomas
Caborn, Richard	Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Callaghan, Jim	Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Grocott, Bruce
Canavan, Dennis	Hain, Peter
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Hardy, Peter
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Clelland, David	Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Hinchliffe, David
Cohen, Harry	Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Corbett, Robin	Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Corbyn, Jeremy	Home Robertson, John
Cousins, Jim	Hood, Jimmy
Crowther, Stan	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Cryer, Bob	Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence	Hoyle, Doug
Cunningham, Dr John	Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Darling, Alistair	Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*	Ingram, Adam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*	Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Dewar, Donald	Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Dixon, Don	Leadbitter, Ted
Dobson, Frank	Leighton, Ron

Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*

Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.
Clause 22 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 77

NON-RESIDENT SETTLEMENTS WHERE SETTLOR HAS AN INTEREST

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Clause 77 is one of several clauses which give effect to the Chancellor's statement in the Budget that we would take steps on the tax treatment of non-resident trusts, a matter which has caused some concern. The clause sets out one of the three main components of the proposals—the requirement that the settlor of a trust caught by the provisions of the Finance Bill will be required to pay capital gains tax on the gains released by the non-resident trust as they accrue.

The other components of the proposals are in other clauses which are complementary. It is a packet, each part of which complements the others. The second element is that, in future, there will be what has been described as an exit charge on a resident trust. A trust at present resident will suffer capital gains tax on capital gains which have accrued up to the time of the trust moving offshore.

The third element is that for those trusts which are not otherwise caught and on which gains are not payable at the time that they accrue capital gains tax will be payable when the capital is remitted to this country. In those cases there will be a supplementary charge, effectively an interest charge, to reflect the deferment of capital gains tax from the time when the capital gains accrued in the non-resident trust. When the capital is remitted to the beneficiary here, there will be a charge which reflects the deferment of the tax.

It is a sensible, fair package of proposals to remedy a possibility of tax avoidance. I commend the clause to the Committee.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I thank the Financial Secretary to the Treasury for his introduction to clause 77 and to the matters that relate to it, which we will explore in more detail in Committee.

The clause and those related to it represent the fruits of the labours of the Government's working group on tax avoidance which was set up in 1988 to deal with a problem that the Government created in 1981. Last year, the Labour party drew attention to the widespread use of offshore trusts as a tax avoidance device. We put forward proposals to curtail the use of those devices, but our suggestions were rejected by the Treasury team during the passage of the Finance Bill 1990.

In Committee last year, I said:

"Other major vehicles of tax avoidance remain. Offshore trusts are still an abused vehicle for imaginative tax planning."

The then Economic Secretary, now, I guess, promoted, the right hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), replied:

"The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East identified a problem about loopholes. They have not been used and the Inland Revenue does not know of any avoidance to date."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 12 June 1990; c. 183 and 184.]

That is what he was required to say when representing the Government's view last year.

The position has changed substantially. Obviously it has not changed at any prompting of mine. I can only assume that it has changed at the prompting of *The Sunday Times*, probably a more authoritative voice with the Conservative party than mine in spite of all my efforts to the contrary. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) shakes his head. I take that as a tremendous compliment; I am sure that it was intended as such.

Last year, on 21 October, *The Sunday Times* drew attention to the same issue on its front page under the headline

"Super rich in massive tax dodge".

We can see that the newspaper is owned by the same people as those who own *The Sun*. *The Sunday Times* Insight team gave specific examples, one of which I should like to summarise as an illustration of the problem.

When Mr. Richard Branson, head of the Virgin airline and entertainment empire, sold 25 per cent. of his record company, the Virgin music group, to a Japanese group, Fujisankei Communications, in 1989, more than 75 per cent. of the ultimate number of the shares had previously been transferred by Branson into five Channel islands trusts.

In spite of him being the settlor and the discretionary beneficiary of all five offshore trusts, he was able to avoid a potential tax bill of £18·4 million, 40 per cent. of the capital gain of £46 million. The money was then reinvested in Virgin companies overseas. Branson's lawyers argued that since all five trusts were controlled by Morgan Grenfell in Guernsey and Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte in the Channel islands, the capital gains had been avoided because none of the profits were Branson's, he having distanced himself sufficiently from the assets so as to avoid taxation.

Hopefully such arrangements will no longer work as tax avoidance devices when clause 77 and its allied clauses and schedules are law. It is not our intention to impede the progress of these parts of the Finance Bill, which are designed as anti-avoidance measures. However, we shall want to examine the detail in Standing Committee.

7.30 pm

I want to give some examples of the sort of scam that we want to be caught by the new legislation. At present it is possible for those with a business to sell to transfer that business into an offshore trust and, under section 126 of the Capital Gains Tax Act 1979, the trustees could sell the business without any charge to United Kingdom tax. The trustees could then reinvest the money in the original owner's business, perhaps remitting the money back to the United Kingdom in the form of a loan. That sort of tax avoidance is legal, although hard to justify morally.

Indeed, the very existence of this Bill, from the post-Thatcherite Conservative Government, suggests that the Government have given up trying morally to justify it.

The example that I have just cited parallels the Richard Branson case that was quoted in *The Sunday Times*. A variation on that theme would be to transfer the asset for sale into a United Kingdom trust prior to disposing of it and then to move the trust offshore. The trustees could then proceed to sell it without any charge to tax. It is clear that the real relationship rather than the contrived relationship between the trustees and the settlor is of crucial importance.

It is useful to note just who the trustees are in the Branson example. Gone are the Rossminster days, when the Keith No. 1 trust, of which Mr. Keith Tucker was the trustee, played its part in the tax avoidance schemes of his brother, Mr. Roy Tucker. Today, the trustees are such firms as Morgan Grenfell and Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—both of which Mr. Branson trusted with his wealth in the Channel islands. According to *The Sunday Times*, Touche Ross promotes a complete offshore trust package for £2,000, plus an annual fee of £3,000. Offshore trusts are now part and parcel of the mainstream tax planners' armoury.

Of course, there are reasons other than that of tax avoidance for setting up an offshore trust, such as the need to preserve commercial confidentiality. However, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of such arrangements have been entered into solely for the purpose of tax avoidance. A further 3,000 such trusts were notified to the Inland Revenue last year, but that probably represents only a small percentage of the number that have been established.

The arrangements work well enough to avoid capital gains tax bills, as they work well enough to avoid inheritance tax. Trusts cannot die. Offshore trusts can also have income tax advantages, provided that the settlor and his spouse are not possible beneficiaries. An example would be a trust for children and grandchildren. In case anyone doubts that that works, I can tell him that, as far back as 1979, the House of Lords gave a ruling in a famous case involving the Vestey family. That case aroused a great deal of indignation.

Mr. Tim Smith: As the hon. Gentleman knows, one reason why trusts became more attractive after 1988 was that the rate of capital gains tax was increased from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. That automatically made them more effective because more tax could be avoided. It is the Government's policy to link the top rate of income tax with the capital gains tax rate. Does the Labour party propose to raise capital gains tax to 50 per cent.?

Mr. Brown: We have no plans to increase capital gains tax. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for enabling me to make that quite clear. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not do it, but I hope that he will encourage his right hon. and hon. Friends not to misrepresent the Labour party's position. I repeat that we have no plans to increase capital gains tax.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Does that mean that the Labour party will break the link between capital gains tax and income tax?

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. David Knox): Order. That is rather wide of the clause under discussion.

Mr. Brown: I accept that, Mr. Knox, but I do not want to deny the hon. Gentleman an answer. I think that the implications of what I have said are clear. The hon. Gentleman has correctly followed the point to its logical conclusion.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Answer the question.

Mr. Brown: I have just done so.

Clause 77 introduces the rule that, for certain categories of offshore trusts, capital gains realised by the trustees are to be treated as realised by the person who created the trust or by its beneficiaries, provided that the settlor, his spouse or any of their children or any company in any way associated with them can in any way, at any time benefit from the capital or the income of the trust. That is comprehensive. The Government have met the first of the points that we put to them in our debates last year and the year before.

I hope that in fairness, Mr. Knox, you will allow me in passing to refer, as did the Financial Secretary, to the fact that clause 71 introduces an exit charge if an existing United Kingdom trust becomes non-resident. We specifically called for that during our debates on the Finance Bill last year. The Government's adoption of our request is most welcome. I note that the Financial Secretary is gracefully accepting my thanks; roll on the Standing Committee stage, with all its long nights. Clause 71 is to be welcomed.

The second aspect of clause 77 is that it stops a settlor hiding behind an existing offshore trust by putting new assets into it that can share the favourable capital gains tax treatment that the trust already enjoys. Such a prohibition is necessary, and I am pleased that the Government have done that. However, the Government have not drawn the clause more widely to encompass offshore trusts where the beneficiaries do not include the settlor, his spouse, any of their children, or any company associated with them. I am not sure why the Government have adopted that approach, but it is something that we can explore in Standing Committee. The Financial Secretary may say that there are not many such trusts in existence. If he does, the suspicions that we have harboured about tax avoidance will be shown to have been well founded. If there is another explanation, I look forward to hearing it.

That brings me to the mystery of what we shall probably end up calling, "The Mystery of the Missing Decimal Point". *The Sunday Times* article referred to billions of pounds, or at least to £1 billion—*[Interruption.]* *The Sunday Times* referred to £1 billion; others have referred to substantially higher figures.

Mr. Maude: Only the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Brown: The Financial Secretary is being mischievous. It is not only me.

Mr. Maude: We are puzzled about the figure of £1 billion that has found its way into the Labour party canon as one of those pots of gold that are just lying around waiting to be raided to pay for its spending. *The Sunday Times* referred to a sum of up to £1 billion. I am not aware of any other estimates that show anything like that amount. The actual amount is a yield in a full year of £10 million, and also preventing indirectly a revenue loss of £100 million. Those figures are very much more modest

[Mr. Maude]

than those suggested by the Labour party, although the proposals in the Bill are considerably more draconian than anything that the Labour party suggested last year.

Mr. Brown: The point has found its way into the Labour party canon because it is such a good shot. I am not sure how the Financial Secretary arrives at his figures for the amount that has been avoided through offshore trusts over the past decade. I should welcome a year-by-year breakdown of the estimated sums that have been forgone. *The Sunday Times* suggested £1 billion. The Chancellor said in his Budget speech, referring to this year alone:

"I therefore propose to introduce measures to counter this tax avoidance"—

he was referring to offshore trusts—

"and to prevent a revenue loss of up to £100 million in a full year."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 134.]

Assuming that the

"up to £100 million in a full year"

is par for the course, the Chancellor clearly thinks that the figure is closer to £1 billion than to £10 million—this is where the missing decimal point comes in—that is shown in the Red Book.

I must thank the Financial Secretary for writing to me about the matter, attempting to explain the difference between the £100 million to which the Chancellor dramatically referred in his Budget speech and the rather more modest £10 million that the Government's Treasury team are hoping to rake in as a result of the change. His answer is not convincing, but I understand the semantic exercise in which he is trying to indulge in justifying it. The truth of the matter is that a substantial sum of money that should have accrued to the Exchequer has been forgone with the result that the tax burden on the rest of us has been increased accordingly.

The Government need to take two further actions to convince us that they are serious about tackling unfair avoidance by the wealthy. The first is adequately to resource the Inland Revenue, particularly its specialist officers, so that more attention can be focused on these issues. When we say that, the Conservative party accuses us of planning more public expenditure on tax inspectors, as if that were a damning thing. But it is our belief—and the evidence is there to sustain it in the work of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee as well as in answers to parliamentary questions tabled by the Opposition—that a little extra investment may reap substantial rewards. Certainly we think that it would be more fruitful to explore that area than to spend the money hounding poor people on social security.

Secondly, we believe that we need to co-operate with our first world trading partners. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) will have heard me say that before. I know that the point is controversial on the Government Benches, but we believe that we need to co-operate in a positive way with our first world trading partners steadily and collectively to block these tax avoidance devices so that at least one nation state collects tax when it would otherwise be due. It will be a long slow business, but I would rather see the British Government moving it along than kicking and screaming all the way.

Finally, I want to ask a question and then answer it. Why are we in this position in the first place? Why is clause 77 necessary? The answer goes back to the deeds of the Conservative Government—I suppose that it is still legitimate to refer to it as this Conservative Government—in 1981 when they introduced section 80 of the Finance Act. That device was the work of the noble Lord Rees who was then Chief Secretary to the Treasury and a notable expert on tax law. Before becoming a Minister he advised on tax avoidance schemes, in the notorious Rossminster affair among others. In short, he knew what he was doing. The Opposition and the national press have repeatedly drawn the Government's attention to the loophole, but it has taken 10 years and a change of leader for the Conservative party to respond. Last year, the Economic Secretary was not even allowed to acknowledge that there was a problem.

Mr. Maude: Apart from last year when there was a fleeting reference of about half a sentence in a debate on the Finance Bill, when else in the past 10 years have the Opposition drawn attention to the problem?

Mr. Brown: I have made a number of speeches on the subject of tax avoidance since I was appointed to the Opposition Treasury team in 1987 and I have specifically referred to the issue of offshore trusts. But to give credit where it is due, the issue attracted our attention when we all obtained copies of Mr. Nigel Tutt's book entitled "The History of Tax Avoidance" which has provided us with an interesting guide through the byways of some of these issues and from which we have obtained part of our agenda. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield keenly follows these matters and I see him nodding and smiling. He will recall that last year I presented the Economic Secretary with a courtesy copy of the book in order to help him in his own consideration of these matters. Instead, all he got was promotion. I do not know whether reading the book helped him or not, but I hope it did.

7.45 pm

The Opposition's bone of contention with the Government is not that they are doing what they are now—that is acceptable to us; we have been calling for it. It is that it has taken the Government 10 years to get around to doing it and in that time £1 billion—I will not quarrel with the Financial Secretary over billion or billions—£1 billion worth of revenue has been lost to the Exchequer. It logically follows that that increases the burden placed on the shoulders of our fellow citizens.

In debates such as this it is important to remember that some of our fellow citizens are poorly remunerated. The other side of the coin is that 3,700,000 of our fellow citizens earn less than £5,500 per year. There are no offshore trusts to help them; no chance for them to avoid their share of the tax burden, most of which is given not through direct taxation but through indirect taxation. The unfairness of their position when compared with the position of wealthy people, such as Mr. Richard Branson and Lady Porter, rightly arouses indignation among Opposition Members, and I think that the Government will find that it arouses indignation among the public as well.

Mr. Tim Smith: I welcome clause 77 as long as we have the capital gains tax regime that we have. It is clearly unfair that rich people should be able to take advantage of what has been a major loophole in the law so to arrange their affairs that they can avoid altogether paying capital gains tax. It clearly has not been an option open to people with moderate amounts of capital, since the hon. Member

for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) has just said that it cost £2,000 to set up one of these schemes and £3,000 a year to keep it going. That would obviously preclude it from being economically viable for people with moderate amounts of capital. Clearly the schemes were designed for rich people, and if we are to have a captial gains tax system everybody should pay that tax and not take advantage of a loophole.

However, on the question of the likely yield, the Committee needs to recognise that a change of this kind will fundamentally change people's behaviour. That is why I object to capital gains tax as a whole. We were talking previously about the way in which people's economic behaviour is influenced by whether or not a particular activity is taxed. There should be no doubt in the minds of hon. Members about what happens with capital gains tax. It is impossible to avoid paying tax on purchases—virtually impossible to avoid paying VAT or excise duty—and it is pretty difficult to avoid paying income tax on income, because it is paid as it arises, but when it comes to capital gains tax, one can work very hard to avoid paying it by simply avoiding making the gain and not realising an asset.

That is what happens. Whether the figure for the cumulative lost revenue is £100 million or £1,000 million, the idea that the yield to the Exchequer will be anywhere near that is ridiculous. People who were realising their assets will think two, three or four times before they do it, so the actual yield will be much lower than any so-called loss of revenue to the Exchequer. There is no doubt about that.

That is the unfortunate aspect of all this. Capital gains tax above all taxes—one of my hon. Friends made a powerful speech on that on Second Reading—distorts economic behaviour. It is self-evident that, the higher the rate, the more likely it is that the behaviour will be distorted. With the benefit of hindsight, I think that change was regrettable. I understand why it was made. The Treasury took the view that it was sensible to operate capital gains tax at the same rate as the top rate of income tax, which is now 40 per cent.

I was encouraged by the remarks of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, about Labour's proposals. He told my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) that Labour does not feel that it is absolutely necessary to operate the same rate. It is reassuring to know that Labour does not intend to increase capital gains tax. Have I got that right?

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To avoid any doubt, I may say that we will have to live with what we believe to be a minor anomaly.

Mr. Smith: That makes the Opposition's policy clear beyond any doubt. I welcome that assurance, because any rate above 40 per cent. would be punitive, and would introduce distortion in a big way. That has already happened. There ought to be a much lower rate, or we ought to do away with capital gains tax altogether. It was introduced only as a short-term measure in 1961, and the Royal Commission that investigated its possibilities in the 1950s came out against it, for various good reasons.

Even with the change made by clause 77, the incidence of capital gains tax will still be fairly arbitrary and unfair. I will not detain the Committee with the details, because that would be to go beyond clause 77. However, although the proposed change is very welcome, we must acknowledge that the yield is likely to be very low, and that the background against which that change is being made is anyway not very satisfactory.

Mr. Beith: There seems to be general agreement among all parties that clause 77 should be included in the Bill, and I certainly welcome it. It is designed to close a loophole that has existed for a decade which has been dramatically highlighted. That loophole has been known to tax advisers and experts for a long time, and it has taken a long time for the Government to get around to doing anything about it.

It is somewhat intriguing, given the timing of this debate, that Labour previously insisted that its incentives for investment could be met from the yield induced by closing the capital gains tax loophole. We included in our alternative Budget a proposition based on the assumption that closing the loophole would yield £500 million. Labour's alternative Budget is very specific:

> "The investment expansion scheme costs would be more than covered by the revenues from closing the tax loopholes for offshore trusts, which currently cost the Government £1000 million."

The Government produced a figure of £100 million, and, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) pointed out, the Red Book gives a figure of only £10 million for revenue resulting directly from closing the loophole in question. There is a necessary difference between the two figures, because presumably there would be a flow of investment into instruments that do bear taxation, which would show up in public revenue. I take that to be the major factor accounting for the difference in the two estimates.

When we produced our figures, and when Labour produced theirs, neither of us had the benefit of the Government's estimate of potential yield, because they were not canvassing any intention of acting against the loophole, and so had not produced a costing. However, the yield will obviously be a lot less than £1 billion. In view of the amount of money that is believed to have been involved, I hope that the Revenue gets back more than the £100 million that the Government estimated. I shall shortly propose amendments to tighten up the measure, to help achieve that objective.

There is general acceptance that it cannot be right, even at higher rates of capital gains tax, for methods of avoidance to be available that allow people with very large resources to spend significant sums on buying their way into overseas arrangements that entirely relieve them of their liability to capital gains tax.

Mr. Maude: This has been a delightfully ecumenical debate, with everyone agreeing that clause 77 is a splendid measure to introduce into the Bill. It is slightly remarkable that the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) claim to have known about the abuse for some time, and have been clamouring to legislate against it year after year. They give the impression that, when the 1981 change was made, the loophole was transparently clear, and that it should have been closed then. History shows otherwise.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I do not claim that the loophole was transparently obvious in 1981—at least, not to me. I became aware of it after reading Mr. Tutt's book in 1987—just at the time that I joined the shadow Treasury team. I may add that it is not I but the Government who are

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

professionally advised, and who have available to them, year after year, the opinions of the Inland Revenue. When did the Revenue first draw the abuse to the attention of Ministers? I bet that it was in 1981.

Mr. Maude: The reality is that no new clause or amendment to deal with the loophole was introduced until 1990. In that year, a new clause, to which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, referred, was tabled but not selected. On that occasion, my right hon. Friend who is now the Patronage Secretary did not refer specifically to the loophole, because the burden of his plaint in that debate concerned dual resident companies, not non-resident trusts. He referred to it only obliquely and in passing, which did not become a serious problem until recently. However, it is now being dealt with expeditiously and thoroughly, as has been acknowledged.

I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who made it clear that the higher the rate of tax, the more attempts there will be made to avoid it—and the more strenuous the tax authorities will need to be in preventing avoidance. That analysis is exactly correct. Members of the Oppostion Front Bench are nodding wisely and sagely, and appear to be agreeing with all that I say—but the points that I reiterate have not made much impact on the Labour party before now.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I always smile, in my genial, good-natured way. That is not something that has been brought on by the present Financial Secretary, because I exhibited the same behaviour to the last three Financial Secretaries that it has been my pleasure to know. I will accept entirely the Financial Secretary's assurance that the Government acted as expeditiously as possible, but only if he will reveal when the risk that the 1981 change would be used for tax avoidance was first brought to the attention of the Government by their professional advisers—specifically, the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: I do not intend to tell the hon. Gentleman what advice I or my predecessors were given by our official advisers—any more than the hon. Gentleman or any of his predecessors who were Ministers in previous Labour Governments would do. I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but, on mature reflection, I am sure that he will understand.

Mr. Brazier: He will get over it.

Mr. Maude: As my hon. Friend says, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, will master his disappointment.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the mystery of the decimal point. Labour's standard approach is to multiply by 10 the estimated yield from a tax change, but to divide by 10 the cost of a public expenditure commitment. In reality, the measure—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed had it right—will prevent a tax loss to the Revenue of about £100 million. It is not possible to be precise, but it will produce a yield this financial year of about £10 million, and in a full year of £15 million. There is no great pot of gold that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East can use to finance Labour's spendthrift policies.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the fact that the measure will stop a loophole, it will change people's behaviour and that there is no predicting the amount of revenue that can be produced? In a sense, it is a misnomer to talk about the revenue that might come from it.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend is entirely right. All one can do in such circumstances is to estimate to the best of one's ability on the basis of accumulated experience and the Inland Revenue what the yield might be from these changes. Behaviour will change as a result of the proposals, but the best estimate is that there will be a modest yield from transactions that will take place.

8 pm

This is one part of a three-part approach which is a considerably tougher and more extensive approach to the problem than that recommended by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East. It will be effective. The hon. Gentleman asked why we should not spread the effect on beneficiaries more widely so that more settlements would be caught. That is the subject of a subsequent debate on amendments to be tabled by the Liberal Democrats. We can explore it then, and I shall explain on that occasion the reason for the approach that we have adopted.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 77 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 14

SETTLEMENTS: SETTLORS

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 129, line 26, leave out 'child' and insert 'descendant'.

The Temporary Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 4, in page 129, line 27, leave out 'child' and insert 'descendant'.

No. 6, in page 129, line 36, leave out 'child' and insert 'descendant'.

No. 5, in page 129, line 36, leave out 'stepchild' and insert 'step-descendant'.

No. 10, in page 133, line 10, leave out 'child' and insert "descendant'.

No. 11, in page 133, line 11, leave out 'child' and insert 'descendant'.

No. 12, in page 133, line 20, leave out 'child' and insert 'descendant'.

No. 13, in page 133, line 20, leave out 'stepchild' and insert 'step-descendant'.

Mr. Beith: The effect of this group of amendments would be to make the settlor potentially liable to tax if any descendant—not just the child—was a beneficiary. There is no obvious reason why the settlors should not be liable to tax on settlements made for the benefit of their grandchildren. The Minister referred to the possibility that a much wider limitation could be placed on overseas trusts affecting other potential beneficiaries. Perhaps he will be able to adduce particular reasons why that should not be so because of the other purpose for which trusts have traditionally been used. I do not see why a trust from which benefits for children are not tax-exempt should provide such an exemption in respect of grandchildren.

Mr. Maude: That is the point raised by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown).

From the temperate way in which the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed (Mr. Beith) moved the amendment, I deduce that he accepts that it is no great point of principle. I concede that, if this were the only part of the proposal—if clause 77 stood on its own without the exit charge and without the supplementary charge on settlements that are not caught by these proposals—there would be a case for extending the net a bit wider.

However, one must recognise that settlements are made in non-resident trusts for perfectly legitimate reasons which have nothing to do with tax avoidance. The burden of the amendment is to prevent tax avoidance and to bring transactions within the charge of tax where they should properly be subject to tax. Our judgment was that it was legitimate to restrict the ambit of this charge—the charge to the settlor—to settlements of which the beneficiaries were the settlor's immediate family, drawn not all that closely, and extending, of course, to companies that the settlor's immediate family controls and to the immediate family itself.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is considerably wider than the corresponding definition for resident trusts, but we believe that it is necessary that it should be wider if an effective charge is to be imposed on those who settle assets abroad from which they or their family can derive benefit. The balance that we have struck is about right. It is a matter not of principle but of judgment as to where one strikes the balance. The gains of non-resident trusts where only grandchildren or remoter issue have an interest will continue to be within the existing provisions, which tax beneficiaries who receive capital payments from the trustees. They will be subject to the supplementary charge which, as I have said, is another important element in the new package and which will apply where appropriate.

In addition, we are strengthening the existing provisions to ensure that capital payments are chargeable when they are received by United Kingdom beneficiaries. We shall keep these measures under review, and we shall not hesitate to take further measures if they are thought appropriate. In the current circumstances, we have struck the correct balance.

Mr. Beith: I hope that the Minister will keep the amendments under review because it seems that he has not convinced even himself that the boundary line has been drawn in the right place. Grandchildren are among the most likely beneficiaries of someone who has made a great deal of money in his lifetime and who is looking for tax avoidance routes to keep it within the family and not pay tax in the process. It is a normal transfer from grandparent to grandchild. I shall not press the matter tonight, but I hope the Minister will keep it under review. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 132, line 28, leave out 'four' and insert 'five'.

The Temporary Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 8, in page 132, line 28, leave out '(6)' and insert '(6A)'.

No. 7, in page 133, line 7, at end insert—

'(6A) The fifth condition is that a person falling within sub-paragraph (7)(a) or (b) below is a person who will or might benefit from the settlement.'.

Mr. Beith: I shall describe the effect of the amendment in detail. Under the Bill as drafted, settlors of pre-Budget settlements are in general caught only if the settlement is subsequently added to, varied or transferred out of the United Kingdom. If the settlors themselves are beneficiaries, there is a strong case for saying that they should be taxed on trusts that already exist in so far as those trusts give rise to income from now on.

The issue was raised as a result of a great deal of publicity given to some large trusts to which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) referred. The public desire to see something done about it, and they will not be satisfied if those large trusts escape the ambit of the clause.

One must draw a careful line on retrospection. I have argued on many Finance Bills against the use of retrospection to create tax liability where one did not exist at the time. My argument now is not based on the creation of a new tax liability for income derived before the Budget. The purpose of the amendments is to deal with tax liability which will arise from now on, and of course, because of the nature of what we are discussing, they will effectively change the timing of tax payments. There are a number of precedents for going about it in this way, including the Inheritance Act 1974, which meant that discretionary trusts set up before 1974 became liable for subsequent inheritance tax.

One must ask whether people should have a permanent tax holiday merely because they were able to exploit a loophole before it was cleared up. Investors in overseas trusts would have been advised that the loophole was likely to be closed in the future. Those people often received advice from fairly sophisticated tax advisers.

There is a similar element of retrospection in schedule 15, which proposes a charge of 10 per cent. a year on the tax liability of pre-Budget settlements. The Government also accept that it might be a legitimate device to use to ensure that the income from now on of some of the settlements made before the Budget was made liable to tax.

Mr. Maude: I am keen to understand what the hon. Gentleman proposes. He talks about income from the trusts, which is a little puzzling. I can see that it would not be retrospection to say that income from a certain date should become liable for tax, and if one announced that from a date that was to be the case that could happen. A capital gain is a different matter. If a capital gain was realised today, for example, there might be a capital gain over a period right back to the rebasing in 1982.

I am not clear whether the hon. Gentleman proposes that the whole of that capital gain, going back beyond Budget day and the announcement of the proposals, should be subject to tax, or whether he proposes that it should be simply the part of the capital gain which has accrued since Budget day. If he proposes the former, that seems clearly——

The Temporary Chairman: Order. This is a very long intervention.

Mr. Maude: Perhaps I may draw to my peroration, Mr. Knox, and finish the point, which was meant to be short, although now I am afraid that I am in danger of having forgotten what it is.

Either the proposal would be retrospective if it were to bring into charge for tax all the capital gain from whenever it began to accrue, or it would simply apply to the part of

[Mr. Maude]

the capital gain which accrued since Budget day, in which case it would impose an impossible task of valuation of all assets in all non-resident trusts on Budget day.

Mr. Beith: I sought to advance the principle—which was rightly picked up by the Minister in his pertinent if lengthy intervention—that we should not give non-resident trusts a permanent tax holiday, but that we should avoid if we can introducing further dangerous precedents of retrospection to add to those in which the Government have engaged in previous Bills and elsewhere in the Bill. The clause about building societies is an example. I am trying to draw a line at the point of the Budget itself, and to move on from there. The Minister has made the perfectly legitimate objection that valuation problems are associated with that, and he may want to deal with that later.

I hope that the Minister will address himself to the central issue, which is that my concern was based on the large sums that have already been put into non-resident trusts. Those trusts will enjoy a permanent tax holiday if the Bill is not amended along the lines that I have proposed. There is a case for an amendment which does not create a retrospective tax liability going back before the Budget but which taxes such trusts in the future, leaving those who would otherwise benefit from them the opportunity of either paying the tax or transferring the assets to some other instrument.

Mr. Maude: I will endeavour to keep my speech shorter than my intervention. I appreciate that the point made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is serious. His concern is that there should not be a permanent tax holiday for existing trusts. I must make two points. First, a non-resident trust already set up under previous arrangements will have to remain untouched—no further beneficiaries added to it and no further funds added to it—for it to remain not subject to the charge introduced by clause 77. If no such changes are made, such trusts do not enjoy a permanent tax holiday if at any time the capital is repatriated to the United Kingdom. At the point at which the capital is delivered to a United Kingdom resident beneficiary, it will be subject not only to ordinary capital gains tax, but to the supplementary charge that we are also introducing which is specifically defined to reflect the lost value to the Exchequer of the deferment of that capital gains tax.

It is not possible to bring existing unchanged non-resident trusts within the new charge on the settlor without either being retrospective by imposing tax on gains that may have begun to accrue some time before Budget day or imposing on the Inland Revenue a gargantuan task of valuation which I am sure that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed accepts would be hugely difficult. It would require a valuation on 19 March, or whatever the date of the Budget, of all the assets in all resident trusts so that one knew the base from which the capital gain was being calculated. That is not a terribly practical proposition.

8.15 pm

I do not believe that we are perpetuating a tax holiday. At the point when capital is repatriated, the gains will be subject not only to ordinary capital gains tax, but to the supplementary charge which is designed specifically for that purpose.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Minister for considering the proposal. I will reflect on his point about valuation. I am touched that the Government are now worried about gargantuan valuation commitments placed on the Inland Revenue, especially when I consider the council tax, which will have precisely that effect. I will reflect on what the Minister has said and see whether either in this context or in the context of the charge at the stage of repatriation to which the Minister referred the point could be pursued later. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That this schedule be the Fourteenth schedule to the Bill.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Country Landowners Association, whose taxation sub-committee I have the pleasure to serve, has raised some points with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I hesitate to raise them in detail at this stage, but I would like to run quickly through them in the hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will write to me about them afterwards. I do not ask my hon. Friend for a detailed reply at this stage.

The points raised by the Country Landowners Association mainly concern the question of what happens to a settlement that was made before 19 March 1991 which becomes subject to the regime set out in clause 77. The conditions on which a pre-19 March settlement becomes a qualifying settlement are quite complicated. They are set out in paragraph 11.

The first condition in paragraph 11(3) is:

"on or after 19th March 1991 property . . . is provided directly or indirectly for the purposes of the settlement—

(a) otherwise than by way of a bargain made at arm's length".

Certain minor activities could make the entire settlement a qualifying settlement. In certain circumstances, if one simply added a first-class postage stamp to the settlement, one could make the entire settlement a qualifying one. There is an argument to suggest that only the new property which is added to a settlement after 19 March should be treated as a qualifying settlement rather than property that existed in the settlement beforehand.

The second condition that would mean that a pre-19 March 1991 settlement became a qualifying settlement is that the trustees of the settlement become non-resident after 19 March 1991. That could cause some difficulties unless the settlor himself has power to appoint or to reappoint the trustees. If he has no such power and if he has no say over who the trustees are, yet nevertheless becomes liable for capital gains tax on the settlement, that could cause some unfairness in some cases. I hope that my hon. Friend will look at that point and will come back to me on it.

The third condition is that a pre-19 March 1991 settlement can become a qualified settlement if there is a variation of the settlement after 19 March 1991. There are circumstances in which settlements might be varied—for example, a foreign court might vary a settlement. Those are circumstances over which the settlor would have no control and which could result in unfairness.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to write at some stage about these matters. I did not give him any warning that I would raise them this evening.

The idea is that a settlor should pay the capital gains tax in a qualifying settlement subject to his right to reimbursement from the trust. If a pre-19 March 1991 settlement becomes a qualifying settlement and therefore gives rise to a liability, would it be possible to have a revaluation of the assets at market value at the time when the settlement enters the regime of schedule 14? That would relieve the settlor of any gains or losses on any non-qualifying period.

I apologise for boring the Committee with these detailed and technical matters. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to write at some stage, and hope that he will do so in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Maude: The Committee will be disappointed that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) has given me a let-out by inviting me to write to him rather than entertain the Committee by responding to the important matters that he has brought to our attention which I shall consider carefully.

We have carefully framed the proposals by which the new charge will apply to existing trusts in particular circumstances to avoid any element of retrospection. If I am right, it is broadly the possible, potential retrospection, if such a concept exists, which is troubling my hon. Friend. That is that an element of retrospection could be triggered other than by the deliberate and conscious act of the settlor or the trustees.

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is partly that and partly that some settlors will have been locked into certain arrangements from which they are unable to withdraw. It is because they are locked into certain arrangements that they find themselves liable to an entirely unexpected tax liability.

Mr. Maude: I understand what my hon. Friend says. Broadly, the settlor should, I would guess, always have the power not to add funds to the trust and hence not to trigger the pre-existing trust into becoming a qualifying one. If there are circumstances that could trigger the pre-existing trust other than that, we shall need to examine them carefully.

My hon. Friend said that there could be circumstances in which the settlor might have no power over the appointment of trustees, where a non-resident trustee might be appointed and thus trigger the settlement into becoming qualifying. It would be an odd appointment. It would be an odd decision for whoever had the power to make the appointment to act in that way in the knowledge that it would bring such a trust within the new regime, if it were possible in the circumstances that my hon. Friend outlined to avoid making such an appointment.

My hon. Friend talked of the power of a foreign court to amend the terms of a trust. I cannot comment on that now. It is a matter to which I shall give careful attention.

My note of my hon. Friend's following point came to an end after I had written "valuation". I cannot remember in more detail what it was, but I shall be glad to deal with it when I have had the benefit of refreshing my memory by reading *Hansard*.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 14 agreed to.

Clause 23

CHARGE AND RATE OF CORPORATION TAX FOR 1991

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chris Smith: The clause sets the rate of corporation tax prospectively for the financial year 1991-92. Our debate on clause 22 of an hour or so ago related to the rate of corporation tax which was being set retrospectively for 1990-91. We are glad that the Government are reverting in clause 23 to the principle of avoiding retrospection in setting the rate of corporation tax. It may be conceded that there is merit in retrospection in exceptional circumstances in terms of clause 22, but as a general principle it must be right that the rate of corporation tax should be set prospectively rather than retrospectively. It was one of the relatively few wise changes to the taxation system that the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) made when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Many of our arguments about clause 23 are precisely the same as those that we advanced a short while ago when considering clause 22. We welcome the relief that is given to many businesses by the reduction in the rate of corporation tax to 33 per cent. We must recognise, however, that the benefit is not felt substantially by smaller companies. We shall come on shortly to talk about the measures that the Government are proposing for small businesses. There will be no benefit whatsoever for companies which have profits of less than £200,000, so we are talking of a limited but welcome measure.

It must be recognised that the benefit that is brought by the clause is substantially outweighed in the relief that it gives by other measures contained in the Budget and the Bill. We must understand the impact on business of the rise in value added tax to 17·5 per cent. Many business commentators have noted perceptively that, while the rate of corporation tax gives businesses something, the rise in VAT takes something away from them. In current circumstances it is difficult for many manufacturers to increase the prices of their goods fully to reflect the additional 2·5 per cent.

I notice in passing that the Liberal Democrats have, perhaps temporarily, absented themselves from our company during these proceedings in Committee. I am surprised at that, given the importance of the clause that we are discussing.

The impact of the VAT change and its outweighing of the corporation tax measures has been commented upon in some surprising quarters. The National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses Ltd., while giving a general welcome to the Budget, had one or two rather perceptive comments to make. The regional liaison officer for Yorkshire said:

> "The really small guy is not selling at the moment and the VAT increase will push his prices up even more."

The regional chairman for East Anglia said about the Budget:

> "It's like the curate's egg, good in parts. The Chancellor has juggled with figures and not helped the cash flow problems of small businesses."

It was precisely the changes to corporation tax in clauses 22 and 23 which were supposed to help with the cash flow problems of business. But clearly many business men and business women do not believe that that has happened.

Another commentator on the Bill, Coopers and Lybrand, said immediately after the Budget:

[Mr. Chris Smith]

"Most entrepreneurs are not going to believe current competition will allow them to increase prices immediately to this extent . . . they may well consider most of these measures"—

that is most of the measures on corporation tax—

"are marginal to their cash flow problems in the face of the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT and its consequences".

At about the same time Phillips and Drew said:

"Although the reliefs on business taxation were welcome, they amount to no more than a teaspoon with which to hold back the recessionary tide."

8.30 pm

It is clear from the comments of many observers on the Bill and the measures which were supposed to help business that, while the Government's measures are welcome to a certain extent, they will not do much to help business in a real way. The verdict of Phillips and Drew that the measures will do little to stem the tide of recession will form much of the focus of our analysis of the Bill in Committee.

On clause 22 we said that the Government would have done much better to have targeted the help that they decided to give to business in order to boost investment in manufacturing industry. Precisely the same analysis applies to clause 23. In clause 22, the Government decided to allocate £380 million worth of Exchequer moneys to the relief that they provided in last year's corporation tax rate. In clause 23 they have decided to give extra relief amounting to £830 million in a full year.

Earlier the Government asked us what the Labour party's proposals would cost. Our answer is simple. The Government are spending a substantial amount in this clause on supposed support for business in the current financial year. We would have made different choices about how to spend that money. We believe that it could have been better targeted, produced better results and assisted more with the recovery that our economy needs.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Given the choice, would the Labour party reverse this decision? Given the choice, would it take us back to the 52 per cent. rate of corporation tax which applied when the Labour party was last in power?

Mr. Smith: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present during our earlier debate. If he had been, he would have known precisely the answer to those questions. The answer to both questions is no. If the hon. Gentleman went on to ask how the Labour party would finance its proposals on capital allowances if we kept the rate of corporation tax envisaged in the clause, I would make one simple point to him. It is a point which Ministers and Back-Bench Conservative Members have failed to recognise about our proposals on capital allowances. We are talking about bringing forward capital allowance moneys for companies. It is money which the Exchequer would have forgone anyway in due course. We are talking about bringing the money forward into an earlier stage of the investment cycle to provide an incentive for the investment. It is not money that is forgone in the long term by the Exchequer. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that extremely important point.

The Opposition have recognised the absolute need to ensure that industry is encouraged to invest. At present our investment performance is sadly lacking. We have identified that as one of the cardinal problems afflicting the British economy and we believe that, welcome though the Government's measures may be to some companies, they are not enough to stimulate the investment that our country needs.

The firm of Rathbones prepared an extremely good analysis of many of the proposals in the Budget. It could hardly be said to be in the pocket of the Labour party. It made some interesting comments on the role of business taxation and the measures in the Budget, especially those which deal with corporation tax. It noted that there was a danger that small companies would face a disincentive to invest because of the way in which the thresholds and ceilings were set. On page 11 of its Budget briefing it says:

"In addition, the Chancellor has yet again ignored the calls to give specific reliefs for manufacturing industry. Presumably he feels that we are now a nation of service companies if not shopkeepers rather than manufacturers."

That was not the Labour party speaking. It was a firm commenting independently on the stance that the Government have taken in the Budget and the Finance Bill. It is not a stance that the Labour party shares. We believe that the cardinal need at present is to improve our investment performance in the manufacturing sector. Of course, we welcome the reduction in corporation tax this year to 33 per cent. But we cannot possibly agree with the Government's refusal to understand that allowances to boost investment are what our economy needs and what the Government should have considered more carefully.

Mr. Mellor: Having spent—perhaps one should say misspent—many years hacking around this place through great long Bills, many full of impenetrable verbiage, it is rather a treat to discuss a clause that states with great simplicity:

"Corporation tax shall be charged for the financial year 1991 at the rate of 33 per cent."

While others may spring to instantaneous understanding of even the densest clauses of Bills, I usually have to look to my crib. But on this occasion the imposing piece of paper headed "Board of Inland Revenue", which is usually my guide, simply says:

"This clause sets the rate of corporation tax for the financial year 1991 at 33 per cent."

Whatever other reservations may have been expressed about the Bill and, referring to an earlier debate, whatever problems of draftsmanship we may find when we go through the Bill in Committee—it is always a brave man who claims that any Bill that he has introduced is devoid of mistakes—clause 23 should at least win the prize for crispness and clarity. It makes clear what we are talking about, which is a start, even if we do not draw the same conclusions from it. Tempting though it is, I shall not repeat to the vast assemblage gathered for this purpose the comments that I made earlier. I should not wish to divert my constituent, Mr. Knox, whose rise to power is much appreciated by his Member of Parliament. I shall require him to read my earlier comments in *Hansard*.

Plainly, there is a philosophical difference between the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and I. I do not necessarily think that it is the end of the world if other people do not agree—it is a perfectly reasonable thing for people to fall out about—but we believe that companies, possessed of the liquidity, can better decide what to do with the money. I gave the figures for the tremendous upsurge in investment in the 1980s, and the upsurge between 1986 and 1989 had much to do with the changes that my right hon. Friend the Member for

Blaby (Mr. Lawson) made in his 1984 Budget. The move to 33 per cent. gives us, once again, the keenest corporation tax rate in the European Community and, indeed, among the G7 countries. In 1984, a sharp reduction was made and others followed suit; we have taken the lead again.

It is the role of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury to pick holes in the argument, even though the Labour party does not criticise us for reducing corporation tax. The hon. Gentleman peddled the argument about capital allowances. I know that several substantial organisations share his view, but the arrangements already in place provide quite a substantial incentive for machinery and plant. Capital allowances for machinery and plant are 25 per cent. on a declining balance basis, which means that for tax purposes most of the cost of an asset can be written off over seven or eight years. If the average life of machinery and plant is about 17 years, as some have estimated, the ability to write it off over seven or eight years, given the current rate of corporation tax, is an attractive basis for companies to invest. I understand that others in industry who consider themselves hard pressed may be looking for another view, but I do not agree with that other view, although we listen to it with care.

The problem is that the Labour party is seeking to ride both horses at once; it wants the benefit of being able to say "Me too." We are asked to believe that a Labour Chancellor would reduce corporation tax—a pledge was given today not to increase it—and make capital allowances. That is all very well as a debating point, but it is not a substantial or convincing basis on which to look forward, as Labour alleges it is, to a period in Government. Governments must make choices; there is no such thing as a free lunch. We are all indebted to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby for making that one of the great clichés of our time. Capital allowances will cost a few hundred million pounds, but that must be paid for.

I am grateful for the clear way in which the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury put his argument; the trouble with clarity is that it reveals problems that a more fudged presentation does not. The hon. Gentleman, as always, was admirably clear. We do not agree on some of the conclusions that can be drawn, but we agree that this masterly, laconic drafting makes clear what we are trying to do—reduce the rate of corporation tax for the next year to 33 per cent. I hope that the Committee will endorse the clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 24

SMALL COMPANIES

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

8.45 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): Clause 24 extends the benefit of small companies' relief from the corporation tax scheme by setting new limits that are substantially increased for the third year running. This year, the lower limit is increased from £200,000 to £250,000, and the higher limit from £1 million to £1·25 million, which represents a 150 per cent. increase in the past three years.

We have done much to help small companies by reducing tax rates. Since 1979, the small companies' tax rate has been reduced from 42 per cent. to 25 per cent., which is the same as the basic rate of income tax. Small companies have benefited from that major achievement. As a result of this year's increase, 3,000 more companies will benefit from the small companies' rate, at which the vast majority of tax-paying companies pay tax. More companies will benefit from the marginal relief, and about 30,000 companies will pay less tax as a result of the increase this year.

Mr. Chris Smith: As the Economic Secretary said, clause 24 sets the level and the parameters of the small business rates of corporation tax for 1991. It possesses less of the laconic quality of clause 23, but none the less it sets out its intentions reasonably clearly.

Clause 24 consists of three parts—it sets the rate at 25 per cent., as it has been for the past year; it sets the profits limit for the small companies rate up to £250,000; and it sets the limit for marginal relief up to £1·25 million. The latter two changes are welcome to small businesses.

We must recognise, however, that those measures provide no help to businesses below the £200,000 1990 threshold. They will be marginally helped by the carry-back provisions, which we shall discuss in Standing Committee, but the clause offers them no additional help.

The clause will bring welcome but limited help. It must be considered, however, against the background of the wider economic recession. For small businesses, that recession has been caused by two factors—the level of interest rates and the introduction of the uniform business rate. In the debate on clause 19 of last year's Finance Bill, we drew attention to the impact of high interest rates on the small business sector.

The Government took many months before listening to us. They have now reduced interest rates to a certain extent, but to far too limited an extent. It is worth remembering that, under this Government, interest rates have been above 12 per cent. since August 1988—for a longer period than the total time of all the previous Governments since the second world war put together. That is the extent of the squeeze which the Government have placed on small businesses through high interest rates.

Only the other week, I visited several small firms in Woolwich. Business man after business man in small businesses spoke to me, not about corporation tax or the thresholds and ceilings at which the small companies rate bites, but about the level of interest rates, even after the recent snail-like reductions that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been introducing. Interest rates have been their primary concern.

The other aspect that has been affecting small businesses is the introduction of the uniform business rate. It has had a differential impact in different parts on different industrial sectors and on different sizes of properties. Last year, 250,000 firms in Britain faced 100 per cent. increases in their rates bills as a direct result of the introduction of the uniform business rate.

Recently I visited some small businesses in York, especially in the retailing sector in the inner-city area. They found that the uniform business rate, together with overall

[Mr. Chris Smith]

interest rates, was the principal cause of the difficulties that their firms were encountering. To tinker with the level and thresholds of the small companies rate of corporation tax may help the prospects of small businesses marginally, but it will not help much. For small businesses facing a recession, clause 24 does not provide much relief. The total value of the change which the Government are introducing in clause 24 is £20 million, yet the recession is causing enormous difficulty and pain throughout the country.

It is perhaps worth looking briefly at the figures which the Building Employers Confederation issued this morning. The press release which accompanies the spring "State of Trade Enquiry" contains several interesting comments. It is worth setting this beside some of the economic hype that we have heard from the Government during the past few days. They have tried to claim that the recession has turned the corner, that the economy is about to recover, and that economic optimism is on the increase. Indeed, earlier this afternoon the Chief Secretary to the Treasury talked about economic optimism surging forward. Clearly, he had not seen the BEC figures. It is worth remembering that its members account for more than three quarters of total construction industry output.

The press release states that the BEC

"has charted a further sharp fall in output in the first quarter of 1991 compared with the fourth quarter of last year."

The main findings of its survey include:

"The steep downward trend in output continuing;

A further rise in spare capacity in the industry; . . .

A sharp fall in confidence about future workload; . . .

Further job losses anticipated."

The press release continues:

"The repair and maintenance sectors appear to have been particularly hard hit by declining demand."

It is precisely the repair and maintenance sectors of the construction industry that contain the most small businesses, as the detailed figures make clear.

Clearly, the recession has hit first companies with small numbers of employees. The percentage of firms reporting less work by size shows that, in the fourth quarter of last year, the very small firms—those with fewer than 114 employees—were suffering particularly from the recession. On average, 60 per cent. were experiencing less work than they had in the previous quarter.

Throughout this extremely interesting report from the BEC, the clear message is that business confidence is still falling, that output is still falling, that the recession is still intensifying and that it is hitting especially hard at the small companies end of that industrial sector. When the Chief Secretary tries to tell us that industry is about to flourish once again without any help from the Government, we are entitled to disbelieve him.

Earlier, I noted that the Chief Secretary claimed that the CBI survey, which came out last week, showed optimism on the increase. In his absence, I must tell him that it showed nothing of the sort. It showed optimism still on a downward trend and that fewer businesses were optimistic than were three months previously. Yes, the rate of decline in optimism may have slackened slightly, but declining it still is. It is important that the Government recognise that. It would be useful if from time to time they would acknowledge that rather than claim that a downturn in optimism is an upturn, because it is not.

The Government could have introduced a package of real measures to improve the prospects for industry, especially small companies. They could have accepted our proposals for investment allowances and introduced measures to implement a programme of training which is especially important for the small business sector. They could have removed the uniform business rate and returned to a locally determined form of business property taxation. They could have given a special boost to research and development. They could have transformed the business expansion scheme into something that benefited manufacturing industry instead of providing a tax haven for property speculators. They could have provided additional interest rate relief.

The Government did none of those things, which would have been a substantial package of measures for small businesses. What the clause contains may be worthy, but it is far too little, given the scale of the problems and the difficulties that afflict small businesses throughout the country. The Government have yet to recognise that truth.

Mr. Maples: The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) accuses this modest little part of the Finance Bill of not doing all sorts of things that it was never intended to do. It is part of a long-term programme of getting down the rates of corporation tax. While the hon. Gentleman is right to say that it will not cure the problems of the uniform business rate, or the recession, or sort out the construction industry, I think that on the whole companies would prefer to pay corporation tax at 25 per cent. rather than the 42 per cent. that they had to pay when his party was in power.

It is a measure that, to companies earning £250,000 a year, is worth £20,000. That is £20,000 more to invest in their business, either in working capital, or in plant and equipment. I should have thought that that would be welcome to them. We believe that on the whole it is better that people should pay lower rates of tax, and this is a move in that direction.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Committee to report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

Maintenance Enforcement Bill [Lords]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 2

ORDERS FOR PERIODICAL PAYMENT IN MAGISTRATES' COURTS: MEANS OF PAYMENT

9 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 4, line 1, leave out 'subsection (1)(a) above' and insert 'this section'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to consider Government amendment No. 2.

Mr. Patten: This is a minor consequential amendment to clause 2. It is required because clause 59(7A), introduced as an amendment to the Bill this evening, contains a reference to a qualifying maintenance order. Because that phrase is used in clause 59(7A), it follows that the definition of that phrase which is given in clause 59(2) needs to be applied to the whole clause, not just to clause 59(1)(a).

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 5, line 16, at end insert—

'(7A) The Secretary of State may by regulations confer on magistrates' courts, in addition to their powers under paragraphs (a) to (d) of subsection (3) above, the power (the "additional power") to order that payments under a qualifying maintenance order be made by the debtor to the creditor or the clerk of a magistrates' court (as the regulations may provide) by such method of payment as may be specified in the regulations.

(7B) Any reference in any enactment to paragraphs (a) to (d) of subsection (3) above (but not a reference to any specific paragraph of that subsection) shall be taken to include a reference to the additional power, and the reference in subsection (7C) below to the additional power shall be construed accordingly.

(7C) Regulations under subsection (7A) above may make provision for any enactment concerning, or connected with, payments under maintenance orders to apply, with or without modifications, in relation to the additional power.

(7D) The power of the Secretary of State to make regulations under subsection (7A) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument and any such statutory instrument shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

9.1 pm

Mr. John Patten: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This Bill has had all-party support and deserves the support of the whole House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Order on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

CIVIL SERVICE

That the draft European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 15th April, be approved.

DATA PROTECTION

That the draft Data Protection Registration Fee Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 25th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 8 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY BILL *[Lords]*
Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY (NO. 2) BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Ordered,

That Mr. Bob Dunn be added to the Committee of Selection.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Community Charge

1. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish a draft Bill on the replacement of the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): The Government are currently consulting on the council tax. Our intention is to introduce legislation in good time to implement the new system for the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. Eastham: Why do the Government intend to wait two years to introduce this new legislation when it is obvious that it could be introduced in the coming year? As the Government appear to have a light legislative programme for the coming year, why are they dithering and not getting on with getting rid of the poll tax? Let us kiss it goodbye once and for all.

Mr. Portillo: I am delighted to have that welcome for the council tax. I wish that all Opposition Members had been so welcoming. Clearly the hon. Gentleman has been reading the *Local Government Chronicle* and he agrees with its conclusion that the council tax will do Manchester a lot of good. As for why we cannot legislate earlier, the hon. Gentleman will know, because the Opposition set it out in a document, that it is necessary to consult on the matter, to get it right and to give the House and another place time to consider it in detail.

Mr. Sims: My hon. Friend refers to the consultation paper, but his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that he has no intention of altering the bands proposed in the document. Will he therefore take this opportunity to explain the basis of the valuation of properties to be put in the bands? I am sure that he will be aware of the concern in constituencies such as mine where it appears that, if the valuation is based on the price of properties as exhibited in the offices of local estate agents, people in quite modest properties will find themselves in the same band as those living in millionaires' row. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend could explain the basis of valuation.

Mr. Portillo: We thought carefully about the number of bands proposed and looked at a number of different options. We decided that seven bands was the right number to put forward as our firm proposal. The capital valuation will be based on capital values—that speaks for itself. A number of special factors may be involved in certain properties and that is one of the matters on which we are consulting.

My hon. Friend may not be giving enough weight to the fact that the tax is intended to collect much less than the old rating system used to do and that we have arrived at a balance where those in the most expensive properties will be asked to pay two and a half times as much as those in the least expensive properties. On the whole, people think that that is a fair apportionment of the burden.

Mr. Wigley: If it will take two years to implement such legislation, have the Government considered introducing parallel legislation, which could come into effect much sooner, to prevent those who presently receive an 80 per cent. reduction from having to pay anything at all under the present poll tax system?

Mr. Portillo: Of course, we have thought about it, but we do not propose to do that. People on income support who are expected to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge bill receive an addition to their benefit in respect of the average of those 20 per cent. bills. There has been no adjustment to the amount that they get to take account of the fact that the community charge has been reduced by £140, so a number are receiving more in their benefits than they are asked to pay in their 20 per cent. community charge. That is particularly the case in those local authorities where the charge is low.

Mr. Oppenheim: Bearing in mind that the Labour party proposes to abolish capping and spending limits if it comes to power, will my hon. Friend invite his opposite number to explain to the House how his so-called "fair rates" figures could be kept down to the quoted levels if Labour abolishes capping and competitive tendering? Are not Labour's figures a complete sham?

Mr. Portillo: Labour's figures are not worth the paper that they are written on—partly because the arithmetic is wrong but also because, as my hon. Friend said, Labour does not intend to limit in any way the amount that Labour authorities can spend. We know that those authorities spend through the roof, if they are given the opportunity to do so. We know also that Labour has opposed the transfer of part of the burden to value added tax. Again, Labour's figures are based on an entirely false assumption—on the lower burden being taken from local taxpayers. However, Labour has spoken out against the VAT increase that made that possible.

Mr. Gould: Will the Minister clear up at least part of the confusion that surrounds his proposals? Although he

published figures purporting to show the council tax under a seven-band system, is it not the case that no work on such a system has been undertaken? Is it not the case also that district valuers were asked to provide estimates on the basis of a 14-band system and that the decision was then taken to lop off the top six bands? Why was that done? Does not that decision completely invalidate the Government's figures and show that the unfair and familiar principle underlying the poll tax has been retained? I refer to the principle that the rich should be protected from paying their full whack, while an unfair burden falls on the rest of us.

Mr. Portillo: We got rid of the unfair principle underlying the old rating system, to which the hon. Gentleman wants to return, whereby the occupants of more expensive properties—even if they had modest incomes—were expected to pay limitless sums towards local government. The hon. Gentleman also wants sole occupants to pay as much as multiple-occupancy households. That was a major unfairness under the rates system, and we are not prepared to return to it.

The hon. Gentleman has been barking up the wrong tree for some time. We devised a system that appeals to the British public as being fair, because it dispenses with the extremes of the rating system. We prefer to base a system on 1991 values, whereas the hon. Gentleman wants to use 1973 values.

Council Tax

2. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the consequences of the distribution of Government grant of the council tax proposals; and if there will be any significant alteration in so far as it relates to Southend-on-Sea.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Grant will be distributed so as to enable authorities to finance spending at a standard level, by levying standard taxable amounts determined by the Secretary of State. Authorities will be compensated for differences in their expenditure needs and for any variations in their taxable capacity. No major changes are proposed to the current system of standard spending assessments.

Mr. Taylor: Is my hon. Friend aware that there was public rejoicing in Southend-on-Sea this year, after years of battling to get rid of the terrible safety net, which forced the people of Southend-on-Sea to subsidise other councils? Is he further aware that my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and I and all the people of Southend-on-Sea would be very unhappy if that wretched safety net were reintroduced? Is there any truth in the unique revelation appearing in *The Scotsman* that Jacques Delors could stop local government reforms by virtue of his latest directive?

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the opportunity to congratulate the electors of Southend-on-Sea on their sensible decision in last Thursday's council elections. Transitional help will continue to be available for households, and we have no proposals to reintroduce area protection grant. My hon. Friend may have been referring to the transfer of undertakings directives, which place a new employer into the shoes of the old employer in respect of dismissals and other aspects of an employee's terms and conditions of employment. If that is the case, those directives apply both to the private and public sector and would have no special effect on local authorities.

Mr. Channon: Is my hon. Friend aware that the proposed council tax arrangements set out in recent consultative documents would mean that, in future, nine out of 10 households in Southend-on-Sea are likely to pay even less than they do now? It is already a low figure because Southend-on-Sea is a prudent local authority. Does my hon. Friend share my belief that that is why the Conservatives enjoyed such excellent results in the local elections and why the Liberals were routed?

Mr. Key: I well recall my happy visit to Southend-on-Sea not long ago. My right hon. Friend is right to point out that, had the council tax been up and running this year, a couple living in a house of average value in Southend-on-Sea would have paid £276, as opposed to a community charge of £416.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call the hon. Member, but I remind him that we are discussing Southend-on-Sea, not Linlithgow-on-Sea.

Mr. Dalyell: Up the road from Southend-on-Sea is Heveningham hall. Does the Minister know who owns it? As it is the subject of a grant—the word "grant" appears in the original question—can the Minister assure the House that it is not owned by the Iraqi Government?

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman will know that there has been substantial correspondence on that issue. I shall look into the question and write to the hon. Gentleman.

3. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the proposed council tax.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The Government's council tax proposal has been widely welcomed by hon. Members and by those involved in local government. I look forward to receiving detailed responses to the consultation exercise now under way.

Mr. Burns: Will my right hon. Friend forgive me if I gently chide him for that reply? The reason is that my right hon. Friend seems not to have included in the representations that he received the thousands of voters in Chelmsford who voted against the Liberal Democrats and voted a Conservative council into Chelmsford, overturning the Liberal Democrat council because they support and like the council tax that my right hon. Friend proposes.

Mr. Heseltine: Having given my hon. Friend's question due consideration, I certainly forgive him.

Mr. McCartney: Would the Secretary of State like to make a further visit to Wigan to explain to electors why the rate of council tax to be levied there is double the rate that will be levied in the Conservative borough of Trafford? In Wigan we will have the highest rate levy of all 10 districts in Greater Manchester. When people in boroughs such as Wigan will have to pay twice as much in council tax as those in a borough such as Trafford, does not that show that something is seriously wrong with the calculations?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not think that I need to go to Wigan to explain the consequences of having a Labour authority in Wigan and a Conservative one in Trafford.

Mr. Norris: There is no doubt that in my constituency of high-valued properties, the overwhelming majority of constituents will most certainly pay far less under the new council tax than they were paying under the old rating system and that the tax is warmly welcomed in that regard. I suggest that there is one point on which I would invite my right hon. Friend to keep his options open—the question of an additional band at the bottom of the scale, at around £20,000, to take account in my constituency of those who live in mobile homes and other low-cost accommodation, who are often the least fortunate. I suggest that there should be an additional band at the top of the scale at about £250,000, because at present those who live in areas such as mine on the fringes of London frequently find that a value of £160,000 on their property does not mean that they are especially rich.

Mr. Heseltine: Of course, I understand my hon. Friend's point. It has been made by other people. One must consider the banding arrangements in the context of the sums of money that separate one band from another. It is the Government's view that, having considered the various permutations, the seven-band arrangement with which we have come forward is appropriate.

Mr. Gould: As the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities could not answer the question about the six missing bands, perhaps the Secretary of State could try to clear up another matter of confusion. What will be the basis of valuation? Will it be capital valuation, without any conditions—as the Secretary of State said—or will other factors be taken into account, as the Minister of State said on Radio 4, or does confusion continue to reign?

Mr. Heseltine: The only confusion is in the mind of the hon. Gentleman because every time that we answer the question he asks it all over again. The fact is that we have come forward with seven bands. We made it absolutely clear, both in advance of our announcement and subsequently, that we considered a number of other options, but we came to the view that the seven-band option was the most appropriate. That remains the position. As for the broad issue of the valuation process, we also explained that. Whereas the Opposition are in favour of capital values, rental values and building and repair costs as a basis for valuation—whatever that may mean—we believe in capital values, and we are consulting on that basis.

Mr. Gould: So the Minister of State is wrong.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend the Minister is not wrong. If people wish to suggest to us specific areas where capital values need modification, we shall consider them. Local government may well produce examples that need specific examination. As we are designing a tax for local authorities to administer and collect, the appropriate way forward is by consultation and not by imposition.

Council Services

4. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which councils have privatised the most services.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department does not collect this information. There has been a substantial shift of work to private contractors as a result of the compulsory competitive tendering legislation. In addition, a number of local authorities have gone further, on a voluntary basis, in using private contractors to provide services on their behalf.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was Conservative local authorities that led the way on competitive tendering? Westminster, Wandsworth and Southend-on-Sea have provided better services. Is not it true that those authorities had the lowest community charge? Was not it the Labour party that was dragged screaming into the 20th century when it refused to accept the privatisation of services? Lambeth is one example, with its high community charge and rotten services. Does my right hon. Friend intend to extend competitive tendering to other services?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is correct. The journey to competitive tendering began in 1980 and continued throughout the 1980s. It is also true that the benefits to the local community—higher quality of service at a lower cost—are to be seen significantly in Wandsworth and Westminster. It is a matter of conjecture whether the Labour party has actually got to the 20th century, kicking and screaming or not.

Mr. Skinner: Despite the hoo-ha about the privatisation of services, is the Secretary of State aware that last Thursday the electors of Britain spoke about that matter and all the other Tory policies? In Bolsover the last four Tories, and the last Liberal Democrat as well, were swept aside. Of the 92 clubs in the Football League, only three are in areas where the local authority is controlled by the Tories. The red flag is flying over Blackpool, Brighton, Plymouth and other seaside resorts.

Mr. Heseltine: The only overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from last Thursday's elections is that the Labour party would not have secured enough votes to form a Government if there had been a general election.

Mr. Squire: I shall revert, if sadly, to the original question. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party's commitment to abolish compulsory tendering at the insistence of the National and Local Government Officers Association and the National Union of Public Employees is a bad deal for consumers and users all over the country and gives the lie to any suggestion that it has forgotten its bad old ways of union-controlled party policies?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right. That is just one more example of why, if the Labour party ever achieved power, it would give us worse services at a higher cost.

Local Government

5. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his intention to create additional parish or town councils outside London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Under current legislation we may consider whether to create additional parish and town councils outside London in the light of recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission. In the context

of the proposals in our recent consultation document on the structure of local government in England, the Government believe that there may be a case for considering whether to enhance the role of parish councils, especially if a new unitary authority were to cover a wide area.

Mr. Barron: Has the Minister considered receiving direct representations from parishioners about parish councils? In Maltby, South Yorkshire, where I live, the district council consistently votes against our having a parish council, although many people in the parish believe that we should have one.

Mr. Key: I believe that 90 per cent. of the hon. Gentleman's constituency has parishes. In our consultation paper, we specifically invite representations, and we shall be glad to receive them from his constituents.

Mrs. Peacock: While my hon. Friend listens to representations on parish councils, will he also listen to representations from my constituents about splitting the metropolitan authority of Kirklees, which provides lousy, inefficient and costly services?

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to say that it is clear that Labour-controlled authorities have a worse record than Conservative-controlled authorities. However, we do not now intend to alter the structure of the existing unitary authorities.

Mr. Bellotti: I am sure that the Minister will wish to join me and other hon. Members in congratulating all those victors in town and parish elections last Thursday, including the 17 in Polegate town council, in my constituency, all of whom are Liberal Democrats. Will he assure the House that the current consultations will not affect the delay which may occur in the transfer of responsibilities for community care to local authorities, which the Government's programme shows is aimed for April 1993? Will he further assure the House that the finance to enable local authorities to plan for that transfer will be re-examined?

Mr. Key: I am glad to reassure the hon. Gentleman that the community care programme is proceeding on time However, I have to commiserate with him on his party's dismal performance in my constituency, where the independents are now the largest opposition, as opposed to the Liberal Democrats.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that until my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State came to office there were rumours that parish councils and town councils might be abolished? What he has said today is very welcome indeed, because there is a general feeling throughout the country that town councils provide an essential element in local government in that they are local.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although it is true that parish and town councils have comparatively small environmental powers, we recognise that loyalty to parish and town councils is extremely strong and we wish to ensure that their voices are heard properly.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) did not answer the question. Will the hon. Gentleman explain what the Government plan to do or what recommendations they will make to redress the mismatch between parish and town councils, particularly in the metropolitan districts? As the survey carried out by Aston university and the consultative documents do not address the real problem in metropolitan districts, will the Government take action to ensure that it will be resolved?

Mr. Key: I assure the hon. Gentleman that before taking action we shall consult properly. That is precisely why we invited consultation. I was glad that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) agreed that that was a sensible way forward. Of course, there are difficulties with parish and town councils. In addition, only about 50 per cent. of the country is parished. There are problems and that is why we are consulting on them.

Mr. Burt: Will my hon. Friend assure us that he does not intend to create any unnecessary and expensive regional bodies which cut right across the public desire to have decisions taken locally, in contrast with Labour party's policy which would bring back those regional bodies? Does he share the concern of my constituents who last week voted Conservative in a 17 per cent. swing from Labour to Conservative and thus backed and supported the Government's policy to say no to unnecessary regional bodies?

Mr. Key: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We have no plans to introduce regional government. Of course, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The number of votes cast in the north-west show a remarkable improvement in support for the Conservative party.

London Docklands Development Corporation

6. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the next annual report of the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Portillo: I look forward to receiving the annual report from London Docklands in July.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the last annual report of the LDDC shows much more concern for the needs of developers than for those of local people? Is he aware that most of the £1·8 billion allocated to rail transport has been used to benefit developers and that the LDDC is not supporting the London borough of Newham's petition for a proper interchange between three new railways at Canning Town? Would it not be a pity if the design defects of underground stations built in the west end at the beginning of the century were replicated in the east end at the end of the century?

Mr. Portillo: I do not want to get drawn into the detail of the station, but the LDDC is a development corporation and it has not supplanted the local authorities, which retain their responsibilities. The LDDC has done a tremendous amount of work with local authorities and other bodies on projects which benefit the community. It has spent about £100 million over the past three years on community projects. It will spend about £87 million over the next three years on community projects and it has made agreements with boroughs such as the London

borough of Newham on the construction of houses and a series of projects on education and training which will benefit local people. That is an extremely fine record.

Mr. Summerson: The LDDC has a good record of making use of vacant derelict land. Does my hon. Friend agree that other authorities should follow the example set by the LDDC and use their vacant derelict land, thus reducing the pressure to develop green field sites?

Mr. Portillo: Indeed. The London Docklands development corporation has already reclaimed 600 hectares of derelict land—that sounds like quite a lot to me—and has a remarkable record. I wish that other local authorities would follow the LDDC's lead. We set up that corporation precisely for the purpose of bringing about regeneration and it is succeeding extremely well.

"This Common Inheritance"

7. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the objectives listed in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance", have so far been achieved; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): In the seven months since the publication of "This Common Inheritance", we have made substantial progress on some 100 of the commitments and proposals that it contained. Many of these were set out in my announcement on 26 March this year. The Government remain committed to the integration of environmental concerns into the whole range of their activities, both in the United Kingdom and internationally. Colleagues in charge of Departments throughout Whitehall are working constructively to press home the White Paper initiatives and to keep up the impetus for progress in the future.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister confirm that one of the main aims of the White Paper was to set statutory water quality objectives? Is he aware that that commitment was first made in 1987 when the National Rivers Authority was set up? It was repeated when the Water Bill was enacted and has now been restated in the White Paper. Despite that, statutory water quality objectives have yet to be set. As we discuss the matter this afternoon, raw sewage and industrial effluent are being discharged into our water courses and rivers. Is not it scandalous that it has taken the Government all this time to set out those objectives?

Mr. Trippier: I totally reject all that the hon. Gentleman has said. His references to legislation omitted the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which also set out water quality objectives. Such objectives are set by the National Rivers Authority in compliance with European directives, which we must implement. As I have stated repeatedly on the Floor of the House, by 1997 we shall be the first member state of the European Community to achieve 100 per cent. compliance with the bathing water quality directives. That is incredible progress.

Mr. Forman: Was not one of the most important objectives of that excellent White Paper that those sectors of British industry involved in pollution abatement and control should expand as quickly as possible, particularly into the export market? What progress has been made in that direction with the encouragement of the Government?

Mr. Trippier: Enormous progress is being made, particularly in water consultancy. As my hon. Friend suggests in his question, there is an enormous amount of business to be secured for British industry in work abroad, not least in central and eastern Europe. A new technology scheme has been introduced by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry and that is proving enormously successful. However, we still need more British companies to come forward to explain what they can do to share their expertise and technology with other countries who need it.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Is not the real problem that the White Paper lacks any real objective, timetable or overall strategy? If we are to tackle the environmental crisis that we are facing, is not it about time that the Government started to give a lead? Does the Minister realise that it is no use the Secretary of State making the kind of statement that he made yesterday about regulating for higher standards or telling industry to be more aware and concerned about the environment when the Government are putting the interests of electricity shareholders before the interests of the environment?

Mr. Trippier: I should point out to the hon. Lady that, prior to the reversal in fortunes for the Conservative Government which we all know took place about a few months ago, there were two principal areas in which the Government led the Labour party. One was defence—not surprisingly—and the other was the environment. That should make the hon. Lady hang her head in shame. There is a stark contrast between this Government's record and that of the last Labour Government, who did next to nothing. We have introduced the Water Act 1989, which has been widely welcomed, and the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to give us the toughest regulatory regime in Europe. We introduced a White Paper setting out our programme for the next 10 years. The Labour party is absolutely nowhere on that issue: we have taken the high ground.

Waste Recycling

8. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in encouraging the recycling of waste materials.

Mr. Trippier: The Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires all waste collection authorities to prepare recycling plans. We shall be issuing guidance tomorrow on how to draw up those plans for consultation. We shall also announce details of the distribution of £12 million of supplementary credit approvals to enable local authorities to invest in recycling. That will add significantly to measures already in place to encourage recycling.

Details will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Amos: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that encouraging reply, but will he have further discussions with local councils to set up schemes, in particular for the individual household waste collection of newspapers, glass bottles and tin cans, which would not only be good for the environment, but would help solve the growing litter problem? Will he join me in congratulating two schools in my constituency, Hexham middle school and Corbridge middle school, on the excellent work that they have done in increasing public awareness about the matter?

Mr. Trippier: With regard to my hon. Friend's latter question, I am happy to congratulate the schools to which he referred and I hope that he will convey those congratulations to them at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to my hon. Friend's first question, we have already been a partner in an experiment that has been running in Sheffield, which is now well known as "recycling city", and that experience has been replicated elsewhere. The scheme has been successful in that there have been doorstep collections and waste has been split up so that it can be recycled. Activity in this area will be stimulated by the new recycling credits scheme that we hope to announce within the next two months.

Mr. Tony Banks: Since we are talking about waste material, how many tonnes of paper were used and how many trees were sacrificed through the scrapping of all the poll tax forms because of Government changes? As it looks as though there is still a great deal of confusion surrounding the council tax, will the Minister recommend to local authorities that they print the new council tax forms on recycled paper or, perhaps, rice paper so that it is more palatable for Ministers when they have to eat their own words?

Mr. Trippier: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the new council tax proposals will use less paper than the community charge proposals.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that, contrary to the comments of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), my hon. Friend's remarks show that the Government's recycling policy has clear objectives? Will he go further and ensure that recycling takes place in Government Departments other than his own and in the House of Commons?

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to say that all Government Departments should set an example and follow that given by the Department of the Environment. I understand that the Services Committee of the House has introduced an option whereby Members of Parliament can choose whether to use recycled paper, so I hope that the vast majority of, if not all, Members of Parliament will take the option of using recycled paper.

Rented Properties (Rural Areas)

9. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any new proposals to provide additional properties for rent in rural areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Yeo): We have taken a variety of measures over the last three years to boost the supply of low-cost housing in rural areas. We have substantially increased public resources through the Housing Corporation for new investment by housing associations, raising the target for the development of new subsidised housing under their special rural programme to 2,250 a year by 1993-94. We recently announced an extra £50 million of credit approvals for rural local authorities for a new programme of low-cost housing and we have amended planning guidance to permit development of low-cost housing for local needs on small sites not otherwise designated for housing.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Minister aware that his variety of reasons sounds like waffle? All that he can manage is the provision of 2,000 extra houses in rural areas, despite the fact that thousands have been sold to council tenants and councils have been prevented by him from replacing them. There is now a massive shortage of council rented tenancies for manual workers, particularly people who work in such places as farm factories or local garages. This is turning the countryside into dormitory suburbs for yuppies. Manual workers, including the lower working class, just cannot afford to pay the prices that houses are fetching. Previously, when tenants died, houses became available. When will the Minister ensure that large numbers of council houses are built in villages so that people may have decent places to live?

Mr. Yeo: As we are within 14 months of a general election, it is most timely that the House has been reminded of the Labour party's underlying hostility to the Government's policy on the sale of council houses. From what the hon. Gentleman has said, it is clear that his mind is still set in the ways of the 1940s. He sees local authorities as the monopoly providers of accommodation for renting. We wholly reject that solution. We are determined to see a substantial increase in the private rented sector and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will persuade his colleagues to support us in that important objective. We are also providing the Housing Corporation with substantially increased resources—rising from just over £1 billion last year to well over £2 billion a year in three years' time—to expand very substantially the provision, through housing associations, of subsidised accommodation for renting. I am glad to be able to say, that, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency alone, the Housing Corporation is spending £1·3 million in the current year on the provision of another 40 units.

Mr. Gill: Although the additional £50 million in the current year is most welcome, I hope that my hon. Friend can assure the House that there will be similar provision in future years so that local authorities and others engaged in the provision of affordable housing in rural areas may have an ongoing programme. It is extremely difficult to generate programmes at very short notice.

Mr. Yeo: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the need to provide an adequate supply of affordable housing in rural areas. We are pleased with the results so far of the £50 million credit approvals that we have provided for the current year. Obviously we shall keep an eye on the situation. We are determined to ensure that all rural areas will get a fair share, whether through local authority credit approvals or through the Housing Corporation. As I said, the corporation is building up its programme. Over the next three years, including the current year, housing associations will build more than 6,000 units in very small villages.

Mr. Battle: How will local authorities in rural areas that have no housing—all their houses having been sold off—fulfil their statutory obligation, under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, to house the homeless? How can that obligation possibly be fulfilled when there are no council houses?

Mr. Yeo: A number of schemes are available to local authorities. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the end of my original answer, where I referred to the fact that

local authorities may now introduce schemes in respect of land not otherwise designated for housing, in which case the land component in the total cost of a house is almost entirely eliminated. In many areas, landowners are coming forward with offers of land and it is up to the local authorities to respond.

Mr. Walden: Does my hon. Friend agree that houses for renting or for sale should not be constructed at the expense of the environment? In the light of yesterday's published estimates of future aggregate demand, will he look urgently at the possibility of encouraging substitutes? If what is going on is allowed to continue, constituencies like mine will look like a lawn after the moles have been at it.

Mr. Yeo: I know of my hon. Friend's close interest in this subject and I am glad to be able to tell him that I entirely share his concern that the proportion of recycled and secondary aggregates that are used in all forms of construction should be substantially increased.

Mr. Soley: Bluster is not going to get the Minister anywhere. Can he confirm that the Association of District Councils, which is Conservative controlled, has consistently told the Government that selling council houses without replacing them—the Labour party's view is that they should be replaced—is leading to a catastrophic shortage of rented accommodation in rural and urban areas? Why does he think that Conservative councils in rural areas have got it so badly wrong and he has got it right?

Mr. Yeo: The House must have listened carefully and in vain for any hint in the hon. Gentleman's question that he supports the policy of selling council houses. It is perfectly open to housing authorities in rural areas to meet needs in the ways that I have outlined; by co-operating with the housing association movement; by taking advantage of our off-site plan policy so that low-cost housing can be provided at prices that are affordable both for sale and for rent; and through the judicious granting of planning permissions to the private sector, which is also ready and willing to help meet the need.

Council Tax

10. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much the council tax would be reduced if Greenwich received the same amount per head for social services and for other services as *(a)* Wandsworth and *(b)* Lewisham.

Mr. Portillo: Neither Lewisham's nor Wandsworth's standard spending assessment would be appropriate for Greenwich, as each has different social and demographic characteristics. Greenwich could reduce its bills under the council tax by reducing its spending, which exceeds standard spending assessment by a larger percentage than any other inner London borough.

Mr. Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is Greenwich council's fault that it lost £2 million on its direct labour organisation and that it is the only council in the country which has met the capping criteria every single year, but that it is not the council's fault that the expenditure needs assessment works against its interests? Will my hon. Friend or his officials meet officers from Greenwich, with me, to discuss some of the implications of what is outside Greenwich's control?

Mr. Portillo: I do not believe that the standard spending assessment works against Greenwich's interest. I remind my hon. Friend that, for example, Greenwich receives much more for education than does either Wandsworth or Lewisham. However, I am willing to discuss with my hon. Friend and representatives of the council the standard spending assessment. If I receive an invitation from him or from the council I shall be happy to join them in a meeting.

Farm Shops

11. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to make farm shops liable to uniform business rate.

Mr. Key: Farm shops are, and have always been, liable to non-domestic rates.

Mrs. Gorman: Even though my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) gave overwhelming support last week to the Government's new policies on local taxation, with an 8 per cent. swing to the Conservatives wiping out a long-standing majority for Labour on Basildon council, thus reducing it from the Arsenal to the Accrington Stanley——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could we relate this to farm shops?

Mrs. Gorman —nevertheless the greengrocers of my constituency are concerned that while they pay the uniform business rate, farm shops do not. Unless my farmers, who are extremely versatile, have taken to growing bananas, pineapples, oranges and kiwi fruit, there is a case for an even playing field to be created for those who sell vegetables all over the country.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to congratulate her electors on a sensible decision last Thursday. My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we wish to see the market operating on, perhaps, a level turnip field. Of course, farmers pay rates not only on farm shops but on agricultural buildings used for the storage of fruit and vegetables grown elsewhere, or for the storage of intervention board surplus grain or skimmed milk. Where produce is sold at the farm gate, the local Inland Revenue valuation officer may make an assessment for rates. A permanent stall situated at the entrance to a farm, used on a regular basis for the sale of farm produce, might be regarded as rateable.

Mr. Corbett: Will the Minister confirm that under the proposals for the council tax there are no plans to exempt farm shops from paying some form of rates? Will he also acknowledge that in scores of small businesses families who live above the shop and at the moment pay the poll tax upstairs and the uniform business rate downstairs would be exceptionally angry if there was any hint of exemption for farm shops?

Mr. Key: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that there are no plans to alter the rating of agricultural premises. We looked at the non-domestic rating system in the first part of our review of local government structure and finance

and decided to retain the principle of the uniform business rate. That does not mean that we are wedded to every detail of the existing business rating system. We are certainly prepared to listen to those who wish to suggest improvements, but we do not envisage any major changes.

Mr. Lord: Is my hon. Friend aware of the immense pressures on farm shops and on all village shops for a series of reasons? Is he further aware that often the people who depend most on those shops are the elderly and those without transport who cannot travel to supermarkets to get goods at cheaper prices? When looking at these matters, will he do all that he can to ensure that we do not pile any more burdens on small shops in rural areas?

Mr. Key: Yes, of course, I shall be delighted to ensure that we give due consideration to important sources of community focus in rural areas. My hon. Friend will acknowledge that it was the revaluation process that many small businesses, and village shops in particular, found difficult rather than the tax itself. If the reform had not been introduced, the small business community would be carrying a burden in excess of £1 billion extra under the old rating system.

Environmental Assessments

12. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet his European Community counterparts to discuss proposals for the environmental assessment of policies, plans and programmes.

Mr. Trippier: The European Commission has not yet formally adopted proposals to require environmental assessment of policies, plans and programmes, but it is a matter which I expect to discuss in due course with my counterparts from other member states.

Ms. Quin: Would not the draft proposals allow environmental considerations to be built in at every stage of the planning process and much more fully than they are at present? For that reason, will the Government put their weight behind the proposals and ensure that progress is made on them as quickly as possible?

Mr. Trippier: I could not possibly put my weight behind the proposals as currently constituted by the Commission because they are, in truth, half-baked.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Too tough.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady intervenes to say "too tough". Rather than any commitment in any Labour party document, I can at least see one in the Government's White Paper in September which stated:

"The United Kingdom is committed to a more systematic approach within Government, to the appraisal of environmental costs and benefits before decisions are taken."

The proposals suggested by the European Commission are in a mess and the vast majority of the member states accept that. I hope that they will be tidied up so that we can achieve our objectives, which I am sure that the hon. Lady shares.

Dr. Hampson: My hon. Friend has led a number of construction industry export drives. Before he joins European Ministers, will he talk to the Treasury about the export credits guarantee policy that it pursues and which has put our construction industry at a disadvantage compared with the European industry, to the point that it now seems that the British trade centre in Moscow will be built by the French and the British airport terminal in Moscow by the Italians?

Mr. Trippier: I shall certainly be happy to raise the matter with my Treasury colleagues.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Given the Minister's commitment when answering question 7 and again in mouthing platitudes from his White Paper, why cannot he now say that he will endorse the principle of environmental assessment of planning and structure development at the local planning stage so that consideration of environmental matters is built into the system and so that we do not deal with them on an ad hoc basis and often far too late? The Minister should put his commitment where his words are supposed to be.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of such matters, as I discovered again in Committee this morning, shows an alarming gap; perhaps he suffers from delusions of adequacy. He has again revealed that he is unaware that the Government have already accepted the principle of environmental impact assessment. It is there in black and white in the White Paper. We intend to deliver and we are concerned about the detail which would have to come from the European Commission.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Although I welcome the Government's commitment to a cleaner environment and especially the White Paper, will the Minister confirm that he will do all that he can to ensure a level playing field in Europe? He will be aware of the 1 million mythical olive trees that the common agricultural policy set-aside scheme supports. Can he assure us that there will not be 1 million mythical rivers for which Europe gives clean water grants from money taken out of our pockets? We obey the rules, but Europe often does not.

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend has a very good point, but I should put it in a very different way. On environmental matters covering Europe, we play cricket, but I am pretty sure that others play rugby. Experience teaches me that the position will improve and that there will be a more level playing field after the introduction of the European Environmental Agency. Then we can make fair comparisons, carefully analyse the statistics put to the agency and compare like with like. At the moment, I am not satisfied that we are doing so.

Mr. Simon Hughes: In the light of the incident off the north Norfolk coast last Friday, will the Minister put on the agenda at the next Council meeting the environmental assessment of the transport by sea of hazardous chemicals? Is he aware that the loss overboard of the ethyl acrylate containers revealed two major defects? First, there is a lack of security in the transport of potentially lethal cargoes which could have a damaging effect on the marine environment. Secondly, once overboard, there was no labelling on the containers, which added to the risk to both marine life and the people trying to find the containers in the difficult waters off that coast.

Mr. Trippier: One point that the hon. Gentleman mentioned worries me—that the containers were not labelled. However, my understanding of the incident is somewhat at odds with what the hon. Gentleman has expressed to the press and in a letter to the Department of

the Environment. Immediate action was taken last Friday. It was confirmed at 3.40 pm that the araldite hardener was no danger to the marine environment and that the other chemicals were only marginally toxic. Neither the hon. Gentleman nor I wishes to mislead the House or indulge in any form of scaremongering which could put the fear of God into many people when it is not necessary. The chemicals were properly stowed in a well-found ship, but the tanks broke adrift in bad weather. That can happen and it has happened. So far, according to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, the matter has been dealt with satisfactorily. I shall look into the precise point that the hon. Gentleman makes about labelling and write to him.

Mr. Favell: As a north-west Member, my hon. Friend may have read in the local press that the Department of Transport has been reported to the European Commission for failing to obtain an environmental assessment of the impact of the A6 bypass. He will certainly have had experience of driving up and down that miserable road and the traffic conditions on it. When he meets his counterparts in Europe will he tell them that the people of Stockport are well capable of assessing the environmental impact of the bypass and that the European Commission should mind its own bloody business?

Mr. Trippier: I shall have a careful look at that, but my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not use such colourful language.

New Houses

13. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new houses for sale he expects will be completed during 1991-92.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): The Government do not make forecasts of completions by private housebuilders.

Mr. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that Blyth Valley borough council in my constituency has accrued £23 million over 10 years through the sale of council houses? Is he further aware that with that money it could have built at least 1,000 houses, but it has built only 290 houses during the whole period? When will the Government start building council houses for the needy and homeless?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that that is £23 million which his local council would not have had if he had listened to Opposition Members. There would have been no right-to-buy receipts to have a debate about. Thanks to the sale of council houses, we have sustained a far higher level of capital expenditure on public sector housing than would have been the case. For the future we look to housing associations, not local authorities, to build affordable homes for rent.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the increase in the number of people in Britain who own their homes is one of the greatest achievements of the Government in the past 10 years? Does he further agree that the key to ensuring an adequate supply of new homes in future which people will want to buy and want to rent is to continue the policy of requiring local authorities to put in place statutory local plans which define where the houses shall be built? The release of adequate land is central to the supply of new houses.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Our planning policies are designed to ensure that there is a five-year supply of land to meet housing needs throughout the country. Through regional guidance and monitoring of the structure of the district plans, it is our aim to ensure that land is available to meet the housing needs of local people.

Mr. George Howarth: In view of the obvious gaps in the information that is being fed to the Minister about the number of starts in homes for sale, I shall help him. I do not know whether he is aware that, earlier this week, the Building Employers Confederation conducted a state-of-trade inquiry into that subject. Its conclusion was—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] I am coming to the question. Its conclusion was this:

"We are pleased to see the very slight improvement in the private house building sector. Any real recovery in the housing market still seems to be a very long way off and will depend crucially on further cuts in interest rates and mortgages"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Paraphrase, please. Do not quote.

Mr. Howarth: There is no increase. What is the Minister going to do about that?

Sir George Young: With house prices stable, with earnings rising between 5 and 10 per cent., and with interest rates falling, the prospects for house buyers and house builders are excellent.

Mr. Dickens: What is the point in building more and more council houses when, at the moment, half a million council houses stand empty? We were talking earlier about recycling. If local government recycled council houses more quickly when they stand empty for weeks and sometimes months, there would be no problem with the homeless in this country.

Sir George Young: I am sure that my hon. Friend's words will have been heard throughout the country. The 10 worst local authorities for voids are either Labour or Liberal Democrat controlled.

Bangladesh (Aid)

3.30 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): The cyclone which struck Bangladesh on the night of 29 to 30 April was one of the most serious disasters in the region's history. Eye witness accounts have underlined the scale of the tragedy. The whole House shares in our grief and sympathy for the Bangladeshi people.

Precise assessments have been hindered by the severe damage to communications caused by the cyclone, and by continuing bad weather. Neither international donors nor the Bangladesh Government waited for information before starting relief operations. On 30 April we authorised our high commissioner in Dhaka to spend up to £250,000 on immediate relief needs. This formed part of the £2·5 million initial contribution announced in the House on 2 May by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd). On 3 May I announced a further £2 million, bringing our total support for immediate disaster relief to £4·5 million.

A major relief effort is now well under way. Fifteen bilateral donors have offered assistance as well as some international organisations. The British response is one of the first and the largest. The physical difficulties involved are massive. Severe damage extends over an area the size of that part of England south of a line drawn between London and Bristol. Much of it still remains under water. Up to 15 million people have been affected.

The port of Chittagong and its equipment have been severely damaged. Rough seas continue to limit access to the islands, which are hardest hit.

The international relief effort must be co-ordinated and duplication avoided wherever possible. At the request of the Government of Bangladesh the United Nations Development Programme is acting as co-ordinator of the relief programmes of the international donor community. To assist in this task we are meeting the costs of two United Nations disaster relief staff.

British experience with previous disasters in Bangladesh, like the major floods of 1987 and 1988, is that non-governmental organisations, working with the support of the Government of Bangladesh, can operate very effectively providing relief. In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, the priority has been to move stocks of food, clothing, medicines and shelter already in the country to the disaster zone, and to ensure adequate supplies of clean drinking water.

Of the £3·3 million of bilateral assistance announced last week, some £2·5 million is already being spent through a number of British NGOs and international agencies on food, shelter, clothing and medicines. A further £50,000 has been allocated for urgent medical supplies and water purification tablets, recommended by our medical adviser based in Dhaka. Staff from our irrigation project have already gone to assist local and British NGOs, who, together with UNICEF, are working to secure cleaner water in the affected areas. Our aid vehicles have also been made avilable to transport urgently needed supplies.

We have established an emergency office in Chittagong that is providing on-the-spot assessments. This will promote co-ordination with other agencies and Government officials. It is staffed by a highly experienced British aid official who undertook similar work during the 1988 floods.

Some hon. Members have asked why we have not sent boats and helicopters. Our high commissioner in Dhaka is in constant touch with the Bangladesh authorities and other donors. He advises us daily on the most effective uses to which our money can be put, taking into account what is being provided by others. We have just heard that large numbers of boats, including at least 100 collapsible boats provided by Japan following the 1988 floods, are available in Bangladesh. Ten Royal National Lifeboat Institution boats which were donated by Britain in 1988 are being used by the Bangladesh Red Crescent. The high commissioner does not recommend provision of further boats from the United Kingdom. Six Bangladesh Navy ships are engaged in getting supplies to offshore islands. Relief goods are also being transported to Chittagong by rail.

Helicopters clearly have an important part to play as long as large areas remain inaccessible to surface transport. In the first instance this need can most effectively be met by countries within the region. India and Pakistan have already provided some helicopters, and I hope that other neighbouring countries may do likewise.

We are playing a full part in addressing Bangladesh's immediate relief needs as they become known. The co-ordination machinery is in place in Dhaka to try to ensure that all efforts are used to maximum effect and with the minimum duplication. I met the high commissioner of Bangladesh in London yesterday to discuss priorities.

I am pleased to announce that we are making available a further £2 million. This brings our total emergency commitment to date to £6·5 million. The £2 million will cover requests from NGOs for further priority relief supplies and the cost of sending the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship, Fort Grange, equipped with medical facilities and disaster relief stores and two Sea King helicopters to assist with relief operations.

In the longer term, we have to accept that it will never be possible to protect Bangladesh totally against floods and cyclones, but certain things can be done to mitigate the effects of such natural disasters. The international community is already helping Bangladesh to develop its flood action plan, which includes further measures for cyclone protection. Other rehabilitation and construction needs will be considered once the immediate relief requirements have been met.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): With such a terrible death toll in Bangladesh, where tens of thousands of lives have been lost and millions of people are without homes, how can the Minister expect us to believe that that is an adequate response to their plight? Welcome as it is, an extra £2 million brings the total to just £6·5 million for what the Minister herself called

"one of the most serious disasters in the region's history."

Ten days after the tragedy, people in Bangladesh are asking, "Where is the help? Why doesn't it come?" They need water, food, medicines and shovels to bury the dead. They need to rebuild their homes and telecommunications system. They need money for cattle, tools and seeds for planting the next harvest. Delivering those is a massive logistical task. It cannot be left to charities. It must be done by Governments, so why has a military operation not been set up?

Is it not the case that the Minister's Department is virtually paralysed because the value of the aid budget is still 12 per cent. less in real terms than it was in 1979? Why has the Minister consistently failed to get more money from the Treasury? Does the right hon. Lady recall that, when a cyclone swept 1 million lives away in Bangladesh in 1970, a British amphibious squadron was there in just over a week, and the Minister was there in under a week, like the present French Minister?

Two years ago, when Hurricane Hugo hit Monserrat, HMS Alacrity served as a centre of communications. Surely there must be a frigate that could do the same in Bangladesh now from the Gulf—or is it that, because of the high rates charged by the Ministry of Defence for the use of planes, the cost of military operations will decimate the aid budget in a matter of days unless the ODA gets new money? Is that why the Minister wasted 10 valuable days before sending two Sea King helicopters? Why were only two sent, when the high commission says that at least 30 are needed?

The German Defence Ministry recognises the training value of using the military in civilian disasters, and the military training budget bears much of the cost while the aid budget bears only a fraction. Why cannot we do the same? Is it not true that the ODA's disaster unit is totally overwhelmed? Why is the disaster unit tucked away as part of the information unit? Why did the Foreign Office set up a round-the-clock Gulf crisis unit on 2 August with 50 staff, while the ODA's disaster unit has just six officials? Excellent though they are, those six officials are struggling to co-ordinate aid to victims of famine, cyclone and Iraqi persecution.

The Minister stressed the importance of international co-ordination, and said that the United Nations Development Programme is co-ordinating the relief effort in Bangladesh. Can she tell us why the United Kingdom's contribution to the UNDP has been cut by 52 per cent. in real terms since 1979? Bangladesh is one of our largest recipients of bilateral aid. Why has disaster preparedness not played a larger part in our long-term aid? Can the Minister assure us that British aid will be provided for reconstruction over the coming months and for cyclone shelters over the coming years?

Finally, will the Minister recognise that there will be more terrible and unnecessary deaths from cyclones and other disasters unless rich countries such as ours care enough about the poorest people in the world to match the killer winds and waves of Bengal with a hugh global effort to fight poverty and deprivation?

Mrs. Chalker: The extra £2 million that I have announced makes Britain the largest single national donor. I will consider further assistance for immediate relief or, to pick up the hon. Lady's last point, for longer-term rehabilitation as it is needed. In that respect work, has already started.

The hon. Lady asked many questions. The help has been in action since Tuesday of last week. The fact that all the detail has not been available even to me has a great deal to do with the awful problems of communication. It is perfectly true that France and Switzerland have been helping with internal communications, but those are by no means all restored. I received a telegram literally after I walked into the Chamber informing me that the problem of reaching the Bangladeshi people is caused not so much by transport difficulties as by the very poor weather.

The hon. Lady may not know that a tornado struck north of Dhaka last night and has obviously stretched resources there. When we were in contact with the high commission this morning, I made available a further £100,000 for the immediate needs of the people affected by that tornado.

The hon. Lady went on about the delivery of assistance within Bangladesh. A donor cannot expect to go into a country and act at variance with the Government of that country. One must act through the Government and the non-governmental organisations, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The hon. Lady mentioned a possible ministerial visit. Willing as I am to go, I do not think that that is immediately appropriate. I am thinking carefully about it, but I am anxious not to tie up necessary helicopter transport. Sadly, that is what happened last week when, I am told, three out of four relief helicopters were involved in ferrying visitors around rather than doing their relief job. I will go once the immediate crisis is over, provided that I can do something truly productive.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction are already part of the Bangladeshi flood action plan on which Britain has been engaged for a considerable time. We shall look at the disaster preparedness in such regions, particularly in Bangladesh, with the international agencies, as we started to do last year.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I thank my right hon. Friend for the help that she has given in meeting this ghastly tragedy and for the assurance that she will consider making further contributions, which look as though they will inevitably be needed. Is the system of stockpiling that already exists to deal with the recurring crises in Bangladesh adequate? If not, will she assure us that that will be a high priority in future help?

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. Stockpiling of tents, sheeting and blankets must take place in the countries and regions involved. It is not sufficient simply to stockpile in this country as we have done, which has helped us to deal with the three simultaneous crises that we now face as a donor country. It is not sensible to stockpile food which could not be used within a reasonable period because food may not remain suitable for human consumption during that time. But I am told that adequate food is available in Bangladesh and we have made money available to the non-governmental agencies to enable them to buy food in Bangladesh for the people affected by the awful cyclone.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The cash and personnel help that the Government are giving is, of course, extremely welcome, but the right hon. Lady will know that six days ago in the House hon. Members from both sides raised the question of the supply of inflatable boats and helicopters. The right hon. Lady has just described the area affected as being equivalent in size to the south of England below the London-Bristol line, including 15 million people. In those circumstances, are not 10 rubber boats and three helicopters pitifully inadequate in comparison with the actual need?

Has the right hon. Lady approached our American allies, who have a large amphibious force in the Gulf which is no longer required there and which could be made available in the bay of Bengal?

[Sir David Steel]

Finally, did I understand the right hon. Lady to say that the Ministry of Defence has sent her Department a bill for the use of RFA Fort Grange? If so, will she send it back?

Mrs. Chalker: I am well aware of the right hon. Gentleman's efforts to keep the needs of the Bangladeshi people in the forefront of the news. We are not just talking about 10 boats; 100 boats are already there from our previous donation. We knew that they were there, but they had to be found by the Bangladeshi people before they could be used. It was far quicker to do that than to send 100 new boats, which would have had to be acquired.

We have said that we will consider further needs, so the right hon. Gentleman need not be in any doubt about our intention to obtain not only a daily report but a many-times-daily report from the people who are there and who can judge far better than I or any other hon. Member what can best be done to help the people most effectively and quickly. I am in touch with other Governments about their plans, and I shall remain so to see what can be delivered quickly to the area. It is important to ensure that the Bangladeshi Government get the help that they can best use, as was done last week.

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on her prompt action, which is an example to many other Governments. Does she agree that this latest tragedy reinforces the urgent need for some permanent international machinery which can stand ready to advise vulnerable Governments and nations on how to deal speedily and urgently with catastrophes of this kind? Will my right hon. Friend take a lead on that?

Mrs. Chalker: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. After my visit to Jordan, when we faced the crisis of Asian refugees from then occupied Kuwait and other parts of the region, I started to put work in hand to examine this issue of the international response. The United Nations disaster relief organisation has always been ready to get into situations which these days seem far beyond its capacity. That is why I am discussing with fellow members of the Community and with international organisations how a better immediate international response could be provided. Work has already begun, and I hope that, before too long, other countries will follow our lead in making the same level of response.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I thank the right hon. Lady for her swift response to the desire on both sides of the House for a statement today. The House will understand the great logistical difficulties involved in getting help to the remote and damaged areas of Bangladesh, and the problems caused by the breakdown of telecommunications between Bangladesh and this country.

What the Minister has already said makes it clear how crucial is the supply of helicopters. The collapsible boats would be fine in ordinary circumstances, but apparently the bay of Bengal has been so rough that people have not been able to use boats. In fact, many boats were sunk during the cyclone, so helicopters are the only way to bring assistance to the people who have been so badly affected. However, there are only nine helicopters in Bangladesh at the moment—four of its own, three from India, two from Pakistan, and two from Britain. I am delighted that we have sent those helicopters—they will play a crucial role—but could we not bring ourselves to make a bigger effort to secure the means to get supplies to the people most in need of them?

Lastly, the House and the country most want to know whether, in reacting to that great and continuing disaster, the Government are clearly committed to sustaining a suitable and adequate response. We should like to hear not only that the right hon. Lady will take action, but that she has the backing of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in meeting the further demands that will certainly be made by the people of that terribly damaged area.

Mrs. Chalker: The right hon. Member is absolutely right to draw great attention to the enormous waves and continuing bad weather conditions in the area, and to the fact that boats there could not operate. We were sorry to note the sinking in the bay of Bengal of a trawler, which I believe was carrying representatives of the non-governmental organisation CARE. We have to consider what is feasible, out there on the water. At the moment, that means making some deliveries by boat and some by helicopter. However, I have been informed that weather conditions have been such that not even helicopters could fly safely into the affected areas.

It is far better to wait—although that is very painful for the people on the ground—than to lose a helicopter, its pilot, and all the medicines aboard. That is why the operation is taking time. I understand hon. Members' frustration that things seem to be taking so long, and I share that feeling, but I must ensure that we continue to be able to look after the equipment that we and other nations supply.

I have been in touch with our chargé in Bangkok to support the request by the Bangladeshi Government to the Thai army for the loan of its helicopters. Those helicopters are nearby in flying terms, and are suitable for operating in the adverse weather conditions that so often exist in that part of the world.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the support of my right hon. Friends. I assure him that I have the fullest support of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and of all the other members of the Cabinet.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that the whole House is pleased that there is a statement on this important matter today. Will hon. Members ask brief question so that, hopefully, I may call every hon. Member who wishes to put a question?

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Given the apparent disagreement among the NGOs, is there not a danger of wasteful duplication? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in future, more aid should be channelled through the United Nations disaster relief organisation?

Mrs. Chalker: I do not find from my discussions with the non-governmental agencies that they are disagreeing; they are working together extremely well. The United Nations disaster relief organisation simply is not large enough to handle the enormous amount being handled both by British and local NGOs in Bangladesh. We have every reason to be thoroughly proud of what British NGOs and people on the ground are doing.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Minister will be aware that hundreds of thousands of British citizens have relatives who may have died, been injured or made homeless in this terrible disaster. Could she share with the House what is being done to get information to that community? Is there a helpline that they can ring? Is her Department in touch with their organisations? As she can imagine, today there must be thousands of people, especially in the east end of London, wondering, and wanting information, about their loved ones.

Mrs. Chalker: I am very well aware of that problem. Although I do not have the same size community with roots in Bangladesh in my constituency as the hon. Lady has in hers, I have many connections and friends in the same worried state as I understand her constituents must be in. As I have already outlined, our difficulty is with the telephone lines and the failure to communicate, or even to have registers of where people are. Sadly, the identification of many people who have died is not an easy process. As soon as the Government of Bangladesh can give us information, I know that they will do so, but at the moment it is very difficult. I could not envisage setting up a hot line, because the information that could come in simply might not be accurate in the confusion that still exists in Bangladesh.

Dr. John Blackburn (Dudley, West): Would my right hon. Friend pay a warm and generous tribute to the large Bangladeshi community in this country for the aid that they are going to give, and would she support them in their efforts? Secondly

Mr. Speaker: Single questions, please.

Dr. Blackburn: Well, finally, would my right hon. Friend give special attention in the long term to the importance of restoring Chittagong, which is Bangladesh's only sea port, to bring in aid and support?

Mrs. Chalker: The answer to both my hon. Friend's questions is yes.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): What is the Minister doing in the longer term to deal with the problem of poverty which exists in that country—poverty which is accentuated when natural disasters hit Bangladesh? For instance, when this is all over, the clearing up will start. Farmers who have lost all their crops will have to buy in seed again. What efforts is the Minister making, with the Bangladeshi Government, to ensure that those same farmers do not put themselves further into debt by having to purchase the seed that will be required?

Mrs. Chalker: Quite apart from this current disaster we have a £50 million-a-year aid programme with the Bangladeshi people, much of which is delivered through local non-governmental organisations, which are active with the farmers and have helped to set up credit unions and so on. All that will continue. Our immediate efforts must be directed towards the relief of those poor people, on tiny scraps of land, who have very little to eat and have no cover. However, I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman that, in the long term, the supply of seed for planting is important and we shall continue to support the Bangladeshi people in the way that we have done, which helps to alleviate poverty.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her prompt, careful and caring reaction to this disaster in Bangladesh. Would she convey to those people in the ODA, the emergency relief organisations and the NGOs the thanks of this House and of all those who are suffering for their hard work over many long hours in response to this disaster? Could she make representations to the Bangladeshi Government that, in the rehabilitation process, people are moved away from the low-lying islands and offshore areas to higher ground?

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for his tribute to the British NGOs, and especially to the ODA disaster relief unit, which comprises nine, not six, officials and which also has the help of many support staff, senior officials in the Department, the Ministry of Defence and the diplomatic wing officials in the work that we are now doing.

I am well aware that the rehabilitation needs will be very great. However, I do not like programmes of forcible movement unless adequate conditions can be provided. People have to be persuaded to go. I am certain that we shall discuss the relocation of people with the Government of Bangladesh, but it is much too early to say exactly how it could be achieved.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The right hon. Lady has rightly placed emphasis on the need for international co-operation and co-ordination in this matter. In that context, what overtures have been made to, and what response received from, the American authorities about the possibility of using the substantial American presence in Diego Garcia, which could be a centre from which aid could come? Will she also tell us when she anticipates that the Fort Grange will reach Bangladesh?

Mrs. Chalker: I hope that the Fort Grange will be in Bangladesh next week, preparing the helicopters as it sails into those waters.

The question of international co-operation—including co-operation with the United States of America and any other country that has bases and likely equipment in the area—is under discussion and being pursued. Therefore, I cannot give the hon. Lady an answer.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Does my right hon. Friend see any risk of an epidemic of cholera in the coming weeks? If so, what is the position with the provision of supplies of cholera vaccine?

Mrs. Chalker: Indeed, cholera vaccine is one of the specific recommendations from the British medical aid adviser in Dhaka. A large quantity of septrin will be sent to Bangladesh, because that drug is not readily available there. We shall also send the other urgently required medical supplies forthwith.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Has the Minister had cause to reflect on the energy and efficiency with which the British Government mobilised for war in the Gulf, and compared it with their response to the disaster in Bangladesh, which has been so dilatory and gravely disappointing? Why has more money not been made available more quickly? Why have not helicopters, amphibious craft and other equipment been redeployed from the Gulf to Bangladesh? Does the Minister understand that, so far, the Government's performance

[Mr. Max Madden]

leaves many in this country and in Bangladesh thinking that they are suffering not so much from aid fatigue as from aid paralysis?

Mrs. Chalker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was listening to the careful answer that I tried to give his right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) about the weather conditions. In recent days, they have made the use of craft already in Bangladesh impossible. The vehicles to get the goods to the people are available in Bangladesh, but the weather conditions have made the task difficult.

The hon. Gentleman brings totally non-comparable factors into his argument. We are not in a war, as we have recently been, but we are dealing with one of the most severe of natural disasters, to which all countries of the world need to respond. That is why all the partners in the flood action plans, and all the partners in the UN agencies, should be seeking to contribute as much as Britain. If they had all done their bit, the people of Bangladesh would already be in a far better state.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is it not rather sad that such a great tragedy should be the subject of party political claptrap? Is my right hon. Friend aware that she was extremely sensible not to waste resources by swanning off on a personal public relations exercise? She should be congratulated on that.

My right hon. Friend told us that Britain's contribution was the largest. What efforts are being made in the EC to persuade some of our partners to step up their contributions, given that they are so good at sermonising on the subject?

Mrs. Chalker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his realism. Our German partners have contributed DM 15 million of assistance. Our Danish partners——

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): That is more than us.

Mrs. Chalker: No, it is not more than us. The hon. Gentleman cannot calculate. At today's rate of exchange, that is £5·068 million. Other countries have contributed various sums, but none as large as Britain's contribution. The French contribution in which my hon. Friend is interested amounts in pounds to £1·18 million only.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Perhaps the Minister would explain to her hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) that the reason why there might be some political divide on the matter is that Opposition Members represent large numbers of constituents with relatives who are suffering. While Conservative Members are busy congratulating the Government, our constituents are extremely worried that comparatively little help has been sent, while there is so much hardware in the Gulf that could be used even in bad weather conditions. What international arrangements are being considered for earlier warnings of possible floods? It happens repeatedly and is obviously an international issue as warnings must come from higher up the Ganges. Other countries must be involved, so that steps can be taken to protect people and to evacuate them in good time.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Lady is quite unfair in what she says about my hon. Friends and their relations with Bangladeshi friends and constituents. I made it quite clear in answer to a previous question that I have already been in touch with Bangladeshi friends. I am just as concerned as she is, but the reason why I will not throw the British taxpayers' money into an aircraft which cannot get to its destination is prudence—not stupidity or unwillingness but prudence. The money has been put up and we know that we can use it to help the Bangladeshi people, and that is exactly right.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): While we are all most sympathetic to the appalling tragedy in Bangladesh and are grateful for the lead that the Government have given, and for the support of other Governments and private individuals to alleviate the suffering there, we must ask ourselves whether we should be discussing the matter as we have no control over it and no responsibilty for it. Furthermore, should we not fix our own agenda in our discussions here, rather than using that fixed by the television companies?

Mrs. Chalker: I can assure my hon. Friend that we do fix our own agenda. However, when so many people are in need, I believe it absolutely right, first, that the world should be told by the media what is going on, and, secondly, that the British Government, in partnership with other donors, should do their best to play their part in relieving the tragedy affecting those people. I and the Government will continue to make sure that that happens. There are tragedies all over the world and whether they are natural disasters or the man-made effects of conflict in places such as Ethiopia and Sudan, we have a moral duty to help the people involved.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The Minister should be aware that many of my constituents, all British taxpayers, are deeply concerned, because of their family ties, about the scale of the tragedy in Bangladesh. They feel, as I do, that the British Government's response so far has not shown the necessary urgency or generosity. Will she reconsider the point that has been raised on several occasions about the need for helicopters? Will she give us a guarantee that, if the Bangladesh Government or responsible non-governmental organisations request the assistance of British helicopters, those helicopters will be sent?

Mrs. Chalker: I have already said that the important thing is to get the aid that the Bangladeshi Government can use to its destination as quickly as possible. That was why, yesterday, I made an approach to the Thai Government, knowing that the Bangladeshi Government —[AN HON. MEMBER: "Why only yesterday?"] I was only told yesterday. The Bangladeshi Government had requested nearby helicopters. The point of doing that work in a logical and sensible way is that we do not waste resources and that we get them to the people who need them. There is no lack of urgency in my Department or in the Government. It is a question of what is practical in some of the worst weather conditions ever in the bay of Bengal.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): May I remind my right hon. Friend that many Conservative Members also have Bangladeshi constituents? We commend her for her vigorous and effective efforts to help their relatives. Does she agree that her comparisons with the Gulf war are very useful? It took six months to build up the troops for

the Gulf war and more than 30 countries were more than actively involved. Should there not be an international reaction to such disasters, instead of the British Government being well out ahead but leading a somewhat straggling pack?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I thank her for what she said at the beginning of her question. It was notable that we had time—not that we wanted it—to build up our forces and stocks and make the necessary assessments and other preparations to free Kuwait from the invasion of Saddam Hussein and his troops. My hon. Friend is also right to say that more than double the number of countries were involved in the Gulf conflict as have made any attempt to help in the present crisis. We need a better international response but, until we have one, we are pleased to continue to do our best and to take the lead where we can.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The Minister says that she has the support of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary. Is the £6·5 million to which she referred—that is only 40p a head for each person affected—new money to her Department or does it come from her existing budget? If it is from her existing budget, is not money being snatched from one area of need to help people in another?

Mrs. Chalker: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that no current aid activity is being displaced or delayed by the £6·5 million expenditure and that £1·2 million of the 10 million ecu aid package announced by the EC and the balance of £5·3 million are from our disaster relief funds. As yet, those funds are uncommitted and are specially kept in the budget. We are well aware of the pressure of having three simultaneous disasters on our hands. I am not afraid to ask for new money when it is necessary but, until I have used my budget, I cannot make as good a case as I can when I have used it. Given the response that I received for £20 million for another disaster last week, I have no doubt that I shall receive an equally generous response from my right hon. Friend.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Did my right hon. Friend hear that there is a great deal of comment about taxpayers' money and Government expenditure on aid? Does she agree that the British Government have done extremely well to be at the forefront of providing that money? However, does she also agree that, although money could be made available through voluntary contributions, it would not be a bad idea for those who can afford it—there may be more such people than realise it—to give as much as 5 or 10 per cent. of their net salary for this month to help the people in Bangladesh and also those in Africa and Iraq?

Mrs. Chalker: I believe that no public are as generous as the British when it comes to giving money for people in need. That is why the British Government have taken measures every year in our budgets to make it easier for people to donate funds, and more beneficial for voluntary agencies to carry out such splendid work. I hope that the British public will respond to the current appeals. The Government will back the people in responding to the needs of those who have been so badly affected overseas.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the Minister accept that she is protesting too much to the House and not enough to the Treasury? If she is addressing the three areas of crisis that she mentioned, why do we read in this morning's newspapers that undernourished children in Ethiopia are having their supplementary food rations halved because donors have not provided the necessary food? Why could she not answer the simple question that was asked on television last night, about whether Britain has donated the 0·7 per cent. of GNP that virtually every other European country has given? Is she not ashamed that Britain has donated only 0·31 per cent. in the light of the crisis that she has outlined?

Mrs. Chalker: I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will allow me to respond to the point that the hon. Gentleman raised on the Ogaden, although it lies outside the scope of this statement. I, too, saw with horror this morning's newspaper report about the specific problem in the Ogaden. I gather that it is partly a delivery problem, but we are looking into the matter with the non-governmental agencies, and I shall ensure that the food that we have already put in the pipeline is destined for such districts. That is exactly what the World Food Programme in Addis Ababa is seeking to do at present.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, which is regularly raised, we have to gain the support of the British people, which now exists, for a higher percentage, and seek to make the aid programme grow in real terms. That is exactly what my predecessors and I have sought to do, and I hope that we will achieve that aim.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Is it not the sad truth, which we are all loth to accept, that sometimes the forces of nature are so overpowering that there is nothing that man can do in the short term to combat them? While the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), I am sure, cares as much about that as we all do, there is little point in suggesting that we provide shovels to plant seed on ground that is still many feet under water.

I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement to the House, which shows real purpose on the part of the Government. Will she assure us once again that we shall do all we can in the short term and stand ready to give the right help in the right place when it is needed?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right to say that the forces of nature are quite terrifying and cannot necessarily be coped with in the short term. That is why we have been supporting work towards the convention on climate change, under which we hope that all countries will take steps to limit their emissions of greenhouse gases, which cause global warming and make the difficulties experienced by such low-lying districts all the worse. We pledged £40 million in 1990 to help the global environmental facility work, which will help countries such as Bangladesh.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): May I reiterate the points made by my hon. Friends about the urgency of the position in Bangladesh, where hundreds of thousands of lives are at risk? While the weather is obviously very bad at present and makes it difficult for helicopters to get through to the offshore islands, that is no excuse for not getting helicopters to Bangladesh so that they can then be used when the weather gets better. Clearly, the Ministry of Defence has at its disposal all the helicopters necessary,

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

but they have to be placed in position. Will the Minister make arrangements to get the helicopters there immediately so that the relief aid can be provided?

Mrs. Chalker: I remain firmly convinced that we must work with the Government of Bangladesh on the plans that they are making for the provision of food, medicine and shelter. We shall be guided by the information that we receive from them, and from our aid co-ordinators on the ground. We shall put in all the aid we can, in conjunction with other countries—the problem cannot be left to Britain alone.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my right hon. Frend accept, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) said, that the staff of the non-governmental organisations and the Overseas Development Administration deserve congratulations for coping with this and the other two great disasters, which are prompting urgent and effective action from private individuals, the national Government and multilateral agencies? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if she needs to come back to the House for approval for extra money to be added to her budget during the year, she will receive a great welcome from both sides of the House? Other people would like her to be successful in achieving movement towards the 0·7 per cent. of GDP target, preferably in a planned, co-ordinated and urgent approach.

Mrs. Chalker: I am certainly aware of the excellent work of the NGO and ODA staff. I thank my hon. Friend for what he said in the second part of his question, and I am glad that I shall have his support.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) made a plea on behalf of Bangladeshi farmers. I should like to make a similar plea on behalf of the fishermen—*[Laughter.]*—the Bangladeshi fishermen—and it is no laughing matter. Many of these people lost their lives along with their boats and fishing gear. With regard to their colleagues who lost boats and gear, will the Minister discuss with her European Community colleagues the urgent need for replacements? Surely, in the maritime communities of the EC, there must be up to 1,000 boats suitable for use by these fishermen, who should not be saddled with heavy loans for the purchase of vessels. The EC and its fishing communities ought to be able to help.

Mrs. Chalker: I certainly note what the hon. Gentleman has said, and we shall consider it. The most important thing is that the Bangladeshi fishermen should be able, when the weather improves, to regain their livelihood. I fully appreciate the importance of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Member present for the statement?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Very well.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I understand your resting between questions, Mr. Speaker. Certainly I do so at times.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while nature can never be entirely stopped, we can spend money, on super-computers and satellites? The better we can forecast tragedies, the better our chance of saving lives. If we could stop nature, we should be better than any god or any David Icke. If money were spent on forecasting, it would help to save human life, which is what we are all most concerned about.

Mrs. Chalker: I fully agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of satellite warning systems. I understand that the people of the area were given two to three days' warning of the cyclone but that, sadly, some of them were unwilling to move.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Some could not.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: some were unable to move. However much satellite warning is given, the machinery has to be in place locally if people are to be able to move; and they have to be willing to move. One cannot make people move, and that can result in great tragedy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall try to call hon. Members who are standing—not those who have been meditating. I hope that questions and answers will be brief, as there is a very heavy day ahead of us. Mr. Nellist.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): There is a business motion.

Mr. Speaker: Do not argue, please.

Mr. Nellist: All I said was that there is a business motion.

Did not the Minister see last night's television news, which reported that, according to aid agencies, more than 500,000 people in Bangladesh had lost their lives, and more than 10 million had been made homeless? It has been announced that two additional Sea King helicopters are to be provided, but a total of 11 helicopters is completely pathetic. In the case of the Gulf, a huge task force was mobilised for the sake of oil. In the case of Bangladesh, where there is no oil, all that the Minister can say is that contact with those who have helicopters is under discussion.

Will not the Minister recognise that, if the cycle of drought, flood, famine and cyclones—decade after decade—is to be broken, she and her Department will have to consider not only the removal of poverty from that country but also the solution of the debt problem? The amount of money coming back to the west in this way each year is greater than the amount that goes out to tackle disasters.

Mrs. Chalker: I am glad to be able to say that international concern can be expressed at the long-term consultative group in Paris at the end of this month. The major donor agencies will be able to discuss what might need to be done for the future. I hope that those who estimate that more than 500,000 people have died are exaggerating. The Government of Bangladesh said today that they believed the number to be in the region of 200,000, but it will be quite some time before we know.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Whatever the figures, the Minister will accept that the disaster for Bangladesh is worse in terms of deaths, disease and homelessness than the events in Kuwait and Iraq over the last year. Given that, may I put it to her that the House and, I believe, Bangladeshis, wherever they are in the world, expect Britain, because of our historic ties with that country, to lead the mobilisation of the western world to go to the rescue of Bangladesh now? We have the capacity to do so. The west has the ships, the aircraft, the helicopters, the personnel and the skill to do so. Next week will not be soon enough.

Mrs. Chalker: If anyone has lost a loved one in a disaster, or has someone crippled by disease, for that family and that person that is the deepest tragedy. Whatever the total numbers, if we add them up across the whole world, it is a sad world in which we live. I hope that the efforts that we are already making to mobilise the western world will succeed, but I repeat that Britain is playing its part and will go on doing so. What I want is support from our partners and others who can also contribute and not leave it all to Britain.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The Minister has acknowledged the contribution made by members of the Bangladeshi community in Britain. She will know of initiatives in various cities by the Bangladeshi community. One problem is co-ordinating such initiatives. Can she offer any assistance to the various groups, such as Indian restaurants run by Bangladeshis in Manchester, who do not know where to send their contributions? Should it be done through the high commission for Bangladesh or through her Department?

Mrs. Chalker: I think that the best thing is to make the contributions to the aid agencies which are already working in Bangladesh. Concern, Save the Children Fund, CARE Britain, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, Y-Care, and, I believe, Christian Aid and Action Aid have already set up operations. In addition, the British Red Cross has put money into the Bangladeshi Red Crescent. All those organisations are worthy of support. Those who wish to donate should donate cash to those organisations, because many of the goods which are needed by the people are available locally in the region. Putting cash into the region is helpful to it, as the hon. Gentleman understands. That is better than sending goods which may or may not be suitable in Muslim communities.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I accept that the Minister and her Department are doing the best they can in the face of the great series of tragedies, within the constraints of Government policy. Does she find it as distasteful as I do, when turning on the television at night, to see desperate, starving people and often in the same bulletin, to see her parliamentary colleagues calling for tax cuts, tax cuts, tax cuts? Will she accept that many people in my constituency, and no doubt many who support her party, would willingly pay higher taxes if they could be sure that the money would be used to help the people in the desperate situation that we see on television every night?

Mrs. Chalker: One reason that this Government have made sure that it is easier for people to give has been their willingness to forgo tax so that people may donate to worthwhile causes. I can think of no more worthwhile causes than the people who are suffering from the Bangladeshi floods, the people suffering in Africa and the people suffering from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and from the penalisation of Kurdish people in Iraq. They are all worthy causes. Of course, there are many more besides.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The ODA is trying to deal with three major disasters. I understand that it deals normally with about 90 disasters a year. It does not have the resources to handle all that. There are six officials in the disaster unit; I believe that the staff have been increased because of the Kurdish problem. The ODA needs more resources from the Treasury. Only in that way can we begin to handle the problems as they should be handled.

Mrs. Chalker: To correct the hon. Gentleman, there are nine officials and their support staff. [An HON. MEMBER: "For how long?"] There have been nine officials for some weeks. We have been drawing on our professional advisory resources, on senior officials, on the Ministry of Defence and on the diplomatic wing, as I made clear in answer to an earlier question. We are coping very well, but the pressure is great. I am deeply grateful to my staff, many of whom have been working enormous hours, all weekends and all hours of the night. They deserve the House's congratulations, not some of the more mean-minded comments that I have heard over the past two weeks.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Should not the ludicrous procedure whereby the Ministry of Defence invoices the Overseas Development Administration for the use of military equipment be terminated immediately? What possible justification can there be for taking money out of the ODA's stretched budget and putting it into the Ministry of Defence's budget? How can the Minister possibly justify that? Will she terminate it immediately?

Mrs. Chalker: I would that I could change all the things that the hon. Gentleman thinks desirable and, even better, those which I think desirable, as quickly as he makes the case for doing so. It is right that we should calculate the proper cost, but I am looking for ways to assist our relief efforts. We find it most convenient on some occasions to use the Ministry of Defence and, on others, to use private chartered aircraft to carry our goods where they are needed.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): In the longer term, will the Government organise trips by contractors to Bangladesh—as they have done to Kuwait—to ensure that, in the future, there are adequate flood defence measures—or at least an attempt to provide them—so that such a tragedy is unlikely to be repeated? Will the Government provide real money for such facilities?

They could perhaps think of using the ability, technology and techniques of workers in this country to preserve and develop lives in Bangladesh instead of pouring away £10,000 million on Trident nuclear weapons. Most people recognise that the priority of preserving life is better than the preparation for destruction.

Mrs. Chalker: I have been very pleased to acknowledge the work of British engineering firms, consultants and others in the Bangladesh flood action plan work, which has now been going on for some time. We have always supported British companies in doing that work, and we

[Mrs. Chalker]

shall continue to do so. I hope that the action will provide work for people in this country, but I cannot deny that I believe that it is absolutely right that, where British companies can do good work abroad, they should be helped to do so and should be given the contracts in order for them to gain work so that people in this country may have employment.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): It appears from the view expressed by some Conservative Members that they doubt the Government's responsibility. Does the hon. Lady agree that some countries, especially this one, exploited Bangladesh to create their wealth over the years? Therefore, does she agree that there should be no consideration of limited aid to Bangladesh at this time?

Mrs. Chalker: I get the firm impression that the hon. Gentleman is living in the past. Bangladesh is a very poor country, and it has always been poor. Year after year, this country has sought to help Bangladesh. Our annual aid programme is £50 million, and this year our aid to Bangladesh is already much higher, because we shall continue to help that country once the flood waters have subsided.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In an earlier reply, when comparing the Government's response in Kuwait to their response in Bangladesh, the Minister said that we were not at war. Many of us think that we should be at war—at war against poverty and against disasters in areas such as Bangladesh. As such disasters are, tragically, likely to continue to occur around the world, could we not benefit from the peace dividend by converting a significant proportion of our armed forces into a disaster response force? The forces have the material and the skills which could be put to such great use in a disaster area such as Bangladesh or elsewhere.

Mrs. Chalker: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was already aware that we had increased our poverty alleviation measures throughout the world and intend to continue to do so. No one could be more grateful than I to the British officers and men who work in various places in the world to alleviate the awful problems that countries face. They do not work only in the well publicised and sudden disasters: British troops go anywhere and everywhere to help when they are needed.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that nothing characterises the Government more than their attitude to war, their patriotism and jingoism and their attitude to the starving thousands and millions throughout the world? Would not she be better displaced today and on other occasions when there is a need for Government money if the budget had been increased to 0·7 per cent. of GNP? Is it not a fact that we live in a society based on the entrepreneurialism of the Tories, in which Gazza can be sold for £8·5 million while we have a paltry £6·5 million for the Bangladeshis?

Mrs. Chalker: I am glad to say that I have no responsibility for Gazza. I do not intend, in the hon. Gentleman's word, to be displaced. Some of the best entrepreneurs among many of my friends and acquaintances have come from southern Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. They are among the best entrepreneurs we have.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask the Minister a question of which I gave her office notice this morning, about the long term, and especially about the flood action plan to which she referred in her statement? What consideration is being given to the effects of global warming on the snows? Will she call into her office Dr. Houghton and Dr. Keith Browning of the Meteorological Office for a considered opinion about the effects of the Kuwait oil fires which are apparently affecting the snows of the Himalayas? We read this morning that the effect has now reached as far as west China. She should ask about the effect on the Bangladeshis of what happens in the upper areas of the great rivers.

Mrs. Chalker: I know that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that Saddam Hussein's action in setting fire to the oil wells of Kuwait was environmental vandalism of the worst order. I cannot predict with any certainty the environmental consequences for the Indian sub-continent or wherever else there may be difficulties. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are studying the emerging scientific work with great care. The immediate priority for my Department is to bring urgent relief to those affected by the awful cyclone and the continuing bad weather, but I shall ensure that our chief natural resources adviser is made fully aware of the hon. Gentleman's question and that we use all the information available to us from scientific sources to pursue the matter.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Last but not least, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to you for leaving me until last. I usually walk up and down the stairs to my office three times a day for exercise but the exercise that I have had in the past hour and 10 minutes will save me the trouble today.

Will the Minister allow me the pleasure of simplifying her statement for her? One hour and seven minutes into answering questions on her statement, all that she has announced is a miserable, inadequate £2 million additional money for the NGOs and an extra two helicopters some time next week. Everything else is under discussion. That reflects the level of the Government's concern about the plight of the Bangladeshis. Will she answer the question put to her by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats? Has the Ministry of Defence sent to her office an account for the use of the vessel that is to go to Bangladesh? If it has, does she support the transfer of overseas aid to the defence budget?

Mrs. Chalker: I will use overseas development resources to help the people of Bangladesh. I shall use not only what has already been announced and what was announced last week and today, but any other resources that are necessary.

The hon. Gentleman does not understand—I do not blame him for that—the way in which Government financing and accounting works. If the hon. Gentleman believes that the resources of one Department are just handed over to another, he is much mistaken, and he would have been mistaken in his own Government, in which he served for a while. The resources that are

necessary for the Bangladeshi people will be provided, but they must not be provided just by the British people; they must be provided by the whole international community.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Minister aware that we are disappointed that many of the questions asked last Thursday have still not been answered today, nearly a week later? I refer to questions about the deployment of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines with sophisticated communications, helicopters and boats, as requested by the Government of Bangladesh, as a Tory Government did in 1970 in response to a similar disaster. It is no use hiding under the excuse of the weather, because, in another area last week, the Minister blamed the European Community and she had to confess her error on that as well.

Will the right hon. Lady admit, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said today, that the charge that the Ministry of Defence makes would devastate an already inadequate ODA budget? Will she now stand up with some courage at the Dispatch Box and say that she will get the Chancellor—at least she will ask the Chancellor—to agree the additional funds to the ODA to cover the cost of all necessary military personnel and equipment to deal with this emergency?

As you know particularly, Mr. Speaker, we have a special responsibility to Bangladesh as a Commonwealth country to lead the aid effort. We have not just a moral responsibility to act both speedily and generously, but, following the elections in February, which I had the privilege of attending, a responsibility to underpin the democracy that now exists in Bangladesh.

Mrs. Chalker: Nobody is more glad than I that Bangladesh now has a democracy. We obviously must help the Government of that country, who are very new and very inexperienced, to carry through the work that they are seeking to do. That Government obviously have no experience of disaster co-ordination, but their army has, and that is why it has now been called in to play a central role in alleviation.

I am, and I hope I always will be, a realist about what can be done. I believe that more resources are necessary in these exceptional circumstances, but, however helpful he might think his comments are, the hon. Gentleman must leave to me the approaches that I have made, and continue to make, for the resources that I need to carry out my job efficiently.

Points of Order

4.42 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance on a serious and perplexing matter relating to European Community Standing Committees A and B. I am deeply concerned about those Committees and, inter alia, their modus operandi. This morning, European Community Standing Committee B was adjourned after about 16 minutes—the Minister may confirm that—among some confusion and irritation felt by Committee members. The Chairman of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), with characteristic courtesy and good sense, agreed to the adjournment of the Committee.

The irritation this morning was caused by, among other things, the dismally late production of the documents that were to be considered by Committee members. Growing anger and concern are being felt by the permanent members of European Community Standing Committee B about the way in which it is treated in terms of, first, the disgracefully short notice of its meetings and, secondly, the unacceptably late production of the documents.

In addition, I am given to understand that Standing Order No. 102 governing such Committees is to be changed, with no consultation whatsoever with the permanent members of the Committee. You know, Mr. Speaker, that those Committees are engaged in very important work—the consideration of draft directives, regulations and other paraphernalia flowing from Brussels. We deserve at the very least some guidance on this disquieting matter.

Mr. Speaker: I am well aware that documents were not available this morning. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to raise his point of order at some length, because it is important that the matters that he raised are on the record for the Leader of the House to deal with tomorrow, as they are matters for him. Does the Minister wish to say something?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): Perhaps it might help the House if I explain what happened and the circumstances. The explanatory memoranda from the Department were made available to the Vote Office when they were published last October and February.

Last week, the report of the Select Committee was delivered to the European unit of the Department of Trade and Industry on Friday. On the next working day, which was Tuesday morning, those papers were delivered to the parliamentary unit at 10.45. There were 100 documents to be photocopied, and they were photocopied. They were delivered to the Hallkeeper's Lodge at 1.15. Those who delivered them were assured by those who work in the Hallkeeper's Lodge that they would be put on the letter board, and I am assured that they were put on the letter board. Therefore, those documents were available to hon. Members by lunchtime yesterday.

If there has been any fault, I am entirely responsible, and I apologise to the House. I have given instructions that in future, even if reports or documents are late coming from Select Committees, the DTI should deliver its

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

documents to hon. Members a full five working days before the Committee meets. I apologise to the House. I am responsible, not my officials.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Not the same point of order?

Mr. Nicholls: My point of order concerns your responsibility for the accuracy of our proceedings, Mr. Speaker. It arises out of early-day motion 775, which is entitled "Alternative to Council Tax" and sets out the inadequacies in Labour's plans. Today's Votes and Proceedings state that 53 of my hon. Friends have also signed it. The difficulty is that the list now includes also the name of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

The implications of that are really quite difficult. If the hon. Gentleman now wants to join myself and my hon. Friends, it may be the start of a long overdue process of conversion. Having seen the hon. Gentleman perform in the House over a number of years, I doubt whether he has undergone a conversion. I think that he has probably been slightly careless in signing early-day motions.

The problem is that we know from the proceedings in the House yesterday that you were able to quote for us from "Erskine May" and point out that, in normal circumstances, obvious mistakes can be corrected. One must simply assume that the addition of the name of the hon. Member for Bradford, West is an obvious mistake. The difficulty is that that view may not have any consensus within the House, because we know that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has been complaining loudly about any change to the record whatsoever.

Is there any consensus about what should be done? Have we any way of finding out whether the hon. Gentleman is a convert to the cause or, in the interests of ensuring that the record stays how Opposition Members want it to stay, should it remain as a standing reproach to the hon. Member for Bradford, West?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no intimation from the hon. Member concerned that he has complained about this matter. It may be a mistake; it may not. No doubt we shall hear that tomorrow.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any intimation from the Department of Trade and Industry or from the Ministry of Defence that they would have wished to have made a statement this afternoon on the news that emerged after 12 o'clock this afternoon, the latest time for raising Standing Order No. 20 debates, that Rolls-Royce is to axe a further 3,000 jobs in Coventry, Bristol, Derby and elsewhere?

I realise that it is possible—I shall try to do so tomorrow—to raise with the Leader of the House the possibility of a debate on this matter, but thousands of anguished families throughout the country will be worried about why those Departments are not at least liaising with that company to talk about diversification and the guaranteeing of jobs, particularly on the day when we hear how air transport is sorely needed all over the world to cope with disasters. Have those Departments approached you, Mr. Speaker, about making a statement to the House about those disgraceful redundancies?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that this news broke after 12 o'clock, which is when I consider such matters. I have not had any information since that time. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman raises this matter at business questions tomorrow, when I am sure that he will get an answer; what he has said will undoubtedly be reported to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that, during my brief absence from the Chamber, a Conservative Member with nothing better to do drew attention to the fact that my name appears on early-day motion 775. I am pleased to inform you that that was a mistake and that the Table Office is kindly making arrangements to withdraw my name.

Mr. Speaker: I am not surprised to be given that information.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

4.50 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law to facilitate the safe entry into the United Kingdom of asylum seekers and their families; to provide a right of appeal against refusal of entry, and a right of independent representation; to make administrative provision for the resettlement of asylum seekers, refugees and their families; and for connected purposes.

The Bill would change the way in which asylum seekers and refugees are dealt with in this country. They are not well dealt with now and it is time to change our approach to them.

The 1951 convention on refugees, which was agreed at Geneva in July 1951, defines a refugee as

"someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a political social group, or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

That was what was agreed after the second world war about those seeking political asylum. Since then, the issue has grown in importance throughout the world. Much of what is written in the newspapers deliberately exaggerates the number of cases in this country in which political asylum is being sought. However, like other European countries, I believe that this country deliberately tries to foist the refugee problem on to other much poorer countries. The largest number of refugees are not in western Europe, but in the poorest countries, such as India, Jordan, Mexico and other places near to considerable conflict.

In the past 11 years, there have been 83,000 applications for political asylum in this country, of which only 13,000 have been granted, with 17,000 being given exceptional leave to remain, which is a sort of halfway house. At least 15,000 applications for political asylum are outstanding.

The purpose of my Bill is to alter the procedures in order to speed them up and to make the system much fairer. The current law on immigration and refugees is unfair and contrary to the general principles of English law in that it has a presumption against rather than in favour of the applicant, as is the case in civil or criminal law.

The Bill has three main proposals. The first is the creation of a refugee protection agency, which would have the job of deciding requests for refugee status, of ensuring that the people carrying out the interviews are properly trained in psychological as well as normal interviewing techniques, and of providing independent interpreters to undertake the translation of the interviews. All decisions would have to be conveyed in writing to the applicant within three months of the initial application. At present, many applications take several years, which often means great hardship for the applicant and his or her family who are often unable to come to this country to join the applicant.

The Bill's second proposal is the creation of a refugee review board, which would hear all appeals before anyone could be removed from this country. A majority of the board's appointed members would have to make a decision against the applicant being granted refugee status for there to be any decision against the applicant. At the board, any applicant would have the right to legal aid. Again, the decision would be taken within three months.

If the board were in operation now, last week's disgraceful incident involving a Zairean refugee could not have occurred. Despite representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), that refugee was bundled out of the country and is now back in Zaire. We do not know his fate.

There was another scandalous case not long ago in which a Kurdish person from Turkey, Shiho Iyuguven, was denied the right to asylum in this country and was subsequently removed, despite strong representations from myself and many others. That applicant refused to go and subsequently took his own life in a horrific and successful suicide attempt at Harmondsworth detention centre. Those are just two of the many cases in which people have been removed from this country against their will and are put in considerable danger if they return to the country from which they came. If they go to a third country, their families are often put at considerable risk of retribution from the oppressive regime that they sought to leave.

The third part of my Bill provides for the introduction of a charter of rights for asylum seekers and refugees in this country. The decision on whether someone should be admitted to this country is that of central Government. Nobody seeks political asylum lightly. Nobody leaves his own country lightly, even if running away from considerable danger. We have a responsibility to treat the people who are admitted into this country humanely and decently. I find it sad when highly motivated groups of people from Somalia, Zaire, Iran, Iraq and central and south America find that, having sought asylum here, they are unable to work because no decision has been made on their right to work. They also find great difficulty in getting housing and are allowed to receive only 90 per cent. of the income support or social security benefit for which they have applied.

My proposed charter of rights would include a right to housing and education and access to the social services. It would also place a responsibility on central Government to ensure that sufficient resources are given to the predominantly inner-city local authorities that are doing their best to provide the necessary services to support people who have sought political asylum. There is something wholly wrong when people who have fled in fear of persecution end up begging for support from churches and charities simply to make ends meet when, as other European Governments have accepted, it should be the responsibility of central Government to provide the local authorities with the necessary finance so that they can provide the housing and education that are so valuable and necessary for those who have sought political asylum.

The charter of rights would also provide for the right of family reunion. Nothing can be more devastating than family separation. Last Friday an asylum applicant from Somalia visited my surgery. He was desperate with worry and concern about his family because he does not know where they are. He is having great difficulty communicating with them and it is unsafe for him even to write to them because of the retribution that might be meted out. He is the sort of person whose family should have the right to come to this country so that they can join him in some safety.

We live in an age when, tragically, racism and xenophobia are on the rise again in Europe. I have a feeling that the Government's approach to this matter, through the Trevi group, which we set up to deal with

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

terrorist attempts throughout Europe but which has now turned itself into a secret organisation dealing also with immigration and refugee policy, has been to agree to adopt a refugee policy in Europe that relies on the lowest common denominator and tries to push the refugee problem elsewhere—never mind the fact that European countries have consistently supported the oppressive regimes, such as that in Iraq, which have forced many people to seek political asylum in the first place. The 1990 Dublin convention is also unfortunate because it exempts people's right to apply to the European Court of Human Rights for justice in cases where they have been denied the right to political asylum.

My Bill also seeks to amend the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, a disgraceful piece of legislation which seeks to fine carriers for bringing into this country people who are not subsequently legally admitted. Last year £6 million was collected in fines under that Act. It means that people seeking political asylum have to pay extortionate air fares to cover the fine that the carrier has to pay if those people are not subsequently admitted to this country. I have met people from Turkey who have encountered that.

That militates against legitimate seekers of political asylum. I pay a warm tribute to the churches and voluntary organisations which have done so much to support people seeking political asylum in this country. I mention especially the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and its general secretary, Ann Owers, and the British Refugee Council, and Jessica Yudelivich who provided much of the information that forms the basis of the Bill.

Nobody in this country has ever woken up in the morning to a military coup or has had his family taken into custody. No one has ever found himself in the position of having no rights of free expression or movement. No one has ever had to leave Britain, probably never to return. We have a responsibility to recognise that those who suffer such fates and who seek political asylum receive justice when they seek safety in this country.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the motion?

Mr. Howarth: I do indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I oppose the Bill with some hesitation because the House was kind enough last week to give me leave to introduce my National Enterprise (Reconstruction) Board Bill.

The whole premise of the measure is to make it easier for yet more foreigners to be admitted for settlement in our overcrowded kingdom. Its other premise is that the Government are lacking in humanity and are mean. The nation and the Government have no need whatever to be ashamed of their performance in this area because we have an honourable record of responding to the needs of others. Those of us who have been in the Chamber for the past one and a half hours heard my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development set out at length Britain's response to the latest natural disaster in Bangladesh. As she said, we are among the first and largest donors and that is indicative of the measure and nature of our response.

There are many other examples showing the support that the United Kingdom, its people and its Government have given to others in need in recent years. The Government have put our forces at the disposal of relief organisations in countries such as Ethiopia which have suffered from famine. Our people have dug deeply into their pockets and I am sick and tired of listening to Opposition Members constantly urging people to give more while they do nothing. The Opposition do not dig into their own pockets but they constantly ask the Chancellor to do something, as though he had money of his own upon which he could draw. The Chancellor can draw only upon our money.

A further example of the United Kingdom's humanity was the admission of the Ugandan Asians when they were being persecuted by Idi Amin. Vietnamese boat people have also been admitted and the House recently sanctioned a measure to allow 50,000 Hong Kong Chinese to settle in the United Kingdom. That worthy record shows that over many years the Government have responded sympathetically, often in the face of opposition from our people who resented some of the measures.

Let us look at our record on the acceptance of asylum seekers. In 1987, 460 were accepted. In 1988 the figure was 970 and in 1989 the number accepted for settlement had risen to 3,000. Between 1979 and 1989 some 34,000 people were allowed to stay in this country and a further 17,800 were allowed to remain here under exceptional leave arrangements.

It is a matter of great concern that applications are rising alarmingly. In 1989 there were 15,500 applications and I understand that last year, for which no official figures are yet available, there were getting on for 30,000 applications. That is 20 times the number of people who applied in 1979. Opposition Members should not lecture us about humanity, because our record in these matters is good.

We deplore the Governments and systems of government in many countries and, since the demise of the much-maligned great British Empire, most countries probaby fall into that category. Under the inspiring and determined leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), this country became a place to which people from all over the world wished to beat a path. *[Interruption.]* That is because of the liberal regime that operates here, and the freedom of expression that Opposition Members seek to deny me. This is a great country to which people from all over the world are anxious to come. However, these overcrowded islands simply cannot become some kind of safe haven for the world's opposition parties. It is enough that it harbours its own Opposition.

We owe it to our constituents to take their concerns into account. There is no point in Opposition Members wearing their hearts on their sleeves and engaging in the sanctimonious humbug that has emanated from the Opposition all afternoon. The money that is sought is that of our constituents. Opposition Members who visit working men's clubs and pubs will find that people are perfectly prepared to pay into voluntary funds organised by the relief agencies. However, they resent Opposition politicians taking money out of their pockets and preening themselves on how concerned and caring they have been.

We cannot be expected to sort out the consequences of everyone else's civil wars, corruption and socialist economic mismanagement. However, the Bill must be seen

in the wider context of immigration policy generally. That was mentioned by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). The Bill is Labour's Trojan horse by means of which they want to effect a policy of uncontrolled immigration, trading on the good will of the British people to accommodate those who have found affliction and oppression abroad.

There is deep resentment in my constituency about a story which appeared last week about an Asian family with seven children who arrived here knowing just one word of English—house. They were instantly housed ahead of people, taxpayers, who had been on the housing list for many years. Labour's policy is to encourage such immigration. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to express his view.

Mr. Howarth: A fine cartoon by Jak in the *Evening Standard* found its way to the *Express and Star* in my area. It shows an Asian family queuing at the immigration desk and uttering three words in English—"G band house"—reflecting the new council tax arrangements. During the last Labour Government's five years of office about 250,000 new Commonwealth citizens were admitted to the United Kingdom for settlement. That was about 50,000 a year. Under this Government the figure has fallen in the last five years to an average of about 23,000—less than half the rate that prevailed under the last Labour Government.

The Conservative party and the Government have a firm and fair policy on these matters, which include the question of asylum seekers. Labour's policy would pave the way for a massive influx of immigrants. The Bill is part of that process and should be rejected.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West) *(seated and covered)*: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for hon. Members to stand in the Lobby, shouting abuse at the hon. Members as they go in to vote saying, "This way for the racists. All the racists go in here."? Would it not be right for the Serjeant at Arms to tell the hon. Member concerned to eject himself and get away from there?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): It is certainly not in order for hon. Members to shout abuse at each other. I hope that, if that has been occurring, it will cease forthwith.

Mr. Ashby: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Should not someone tell that hon. Member to stop and eject him, because his abusive behaviour is interfering with voting? Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, arrange that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If that has been happening, I hope that the hon. Members involved will take note that from the Chair I have strongly deprecated such conduct.

Mr. Ashby: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The problem is that hon. Members in the Lobby cannot hear what you are saying. They are in the Lobby stopping people from voting and it is still going on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that what I have said from the Chair has, in fact, been conveyed to those hon. Members.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point) *(seated and covered)*: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been an hon. Member for more than 40 years and I have never before witnessed the sort of behaviour that has been taking place for some time during this Division. It was threatening in character, abusive, and it might have confused hon. Members coming in to vote. In that respect I support my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby). It is no use expressing an opinion from the Chair that cannot be heard by the offenders. I hope you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will instruct the appropriate Officer of the House to call upon the hon. Member involved to desist.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that there has been no physical obstruction in the Division Lobbies. That is my concern from the Chair. I repeat that if there has been verbal abuse, it is grossly out of order and I strongly deprecate it.

Mr. Ashby: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) did not just say, "This way racists"; he also said, "Pick up your legs and goosestep in" and other phrases of that sort to hon. Members who wish to vote freely. Would it not be right for you to call that hon. Member to order and to explain himself? I see that he is entering the Chamber. It is disgraceful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is nothing further I can do at this stage. The doors have now been locked, but it is exceedingly important in this place that we observe restraint in our language and in our conduct.

Mr. Ashby: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it not be proper to ask the hon. Member to apologise for his obstructiveness? Should we not have an apology for his misconduct?

The House having divided: Ayes 116, Noes 73.

Division No. 137] **[5.08 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David

Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Hara, Edward
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Banks and
Mr. Peter Hain.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Allason, Rupert
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fox, Sir Marcus
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Grylls, Michael
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Riddick, Graham
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Wiggin, Jerry

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerald Howarth and
Sir John Stokes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Dave Nellist, Ms. Diane Abbott, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Bernie Grant, Ms. Mildred Gordon, Mr. Keith Vaz, and Mr. Brian Sedgemore.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES BILL

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law to facilitate the safe entry into the United Kingdom of asylum seekers and their families; to provide a right of appeal against refusal of entry, and a right of independent representation; to make administrative provision for the resettlement of asylum seekers, refugees and their families; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 May and to be printed. [Bill 154.]

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

(Clauses 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 31, 77 and Schedule 14)
Considered in Committee [Progress 7 May.]

[MISS BETTY BOOTHROYD *in the Chair*]

5.20 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): On a point of order, Miss Boothroyd. I want to raise a matter that I believe affects the constitutional behaviour of the House. It is obvious from the events surrounding the presentation just now of a private Member's Bill that anything that occurs outside this Chamber is not within the purview of the Chair. We have seen today a violation of the procedure of the House, whereby an hon. Member stood outside either the Ayes or the Noes Lobby, exhorting right hon. and hon. Members to vote this way or that way in a very offensive manner. Something should be done to prevent right hon. and hon. Members from being subjected to that kind of behaviour by someone who does not really believe in democracy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I will take no further points of order on that matter. A number were raised earlier. Mr. Speaker will be made fully aware of what took place, and if he has anything to report to the House, he will do so tomorrow.

Clause 31

RELIEF

5.22 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 21, line 14, leave out '1992' and insert '1991'.

Unemployment is rising, the economy is in recession and our trading relationships with our European partners require our economy to be as strong and competitive as theirs. In those circumstances, it is right for us to discuss education and training. It may be commonplace to say that this country's greatest single asset is the skills and abilities of its people, but I predict that over the next decade that will become even more self-evident.

In a timid but nevertheless welcome way, the clause acknowledges the need for education and training. It will allow people to claim tax relief for course fees, assessment, and regulation costs for properly accredited vocational training. It requires a claimant to be a United Kingdom resident who is undertaking a course without any public financial assistance or other type of tax relief to help with its cost. Companies have always been able to obtain tax relief for providing training, and the clause is designed to allow individuals who incur expenses to do the same.

I shall leave to one side for the moment the issues that we want to explore with the Government on other amendments. As far as it goes, clause 31 is welcome—so welcome that our amendment is intended to make the tax relief begin this tax year rather than in 1992, as the Government intend. I understand that the cost of the change that we propose would be about £15 million, although I suspect that it might turn out to be less.

I can think of only three possible objections to our proposal. First, it might be argued that the MIRAS-type arrangements that are supposed to accompany the tax relief cannot be put in place in time. That does not seem to be an insuperable reason for not granting the relief now. It would be possible, by deduction or set-off, to give taxpayers the relief at the end of the tax year.

Secondly, it might be suggested that the regulations for those not liable for tax, but who would nevertheless be able to take some advantage of the scheme, would not be in place in time, so that the arrangement could not start in 1991. That does not seem to be an insuperable difficulty, either. I do not think that many people would come into that category. It may be possible to think of examples of people without a charge to tax who would still be able to pay for their own vocational training, but it is hardly likely that there will be many. I am sure that the Inland Revenue would be able to deal with the small number involved.

The third possible Government objection is that the public expenditure implications of starting the scheme in this financial year rather than the next would be beyond their resources. They may say that they could not possibly spend up to an extra £15 million on training. Such a sum would be slightly more than a quarter of the publicity budget of the Department of Employment, which puts the matter in perspective. We could forgo a little publicity and encourage more training instead.

The real disagreement between the Government and ourselves is whether, in the present economic climate—with rising unemployment and industry complaining of skill shortages—it is necessary for the future well-being of the economy to make training a priority use of public expenditure. Of course, the costs of the scheme are important, but so is the price of unemployment. It costs the state about £8,000 per annum if a person who could be economically productive is kept unemployed.

The costs of our declining international competitiveness are important, too. I welcome the present direction of trade agreements, but they mean that over the next decade our ability to compete internationally is bound to become even more important. To forgo training in those circumstances seems foolish.

Other important costs are those that skill shortages cause British employers, who will rightly argue that skill shortages are not easily met in the short term. It is a privilege of speaking from the Opposition Front Bench to be able to draw on examples from one's own community. There could be no more pertinent example than that offered by Tyneside, where my constituency lies. It is an area noted for its skilled work force. The skills there have been accumulated over generations because of the presence of the shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries. Those industries have endured an enormous, and probably permanent, shake-out, in employment terms, in the past decade. Alongside that, no region has suffered more from persistently higher than average levels of unemployment. Yet, in spite of that residue of highly skilled manual workers on Tyneside, employers are complaining of skill shortages. The high unemployment rates that the Tyneside community is still enduring are composed of unskilled workers more than any other single element.

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

The Swan Hunter shipyard is a good example, as it is not always easy for that major employer on Tyneside to find people to fill skilled vacancies. That might surprise Conservative Members, in view of the shake-out in the shipbuilding and engineering industries, but it is the case. There is a waiting list of about 2,000 people for the occasional unskilled job at that workplace. Those circumstances will be mirrored throughout Tyneside and if they are mirrored there, where there is a residue of skilled labour, how much more likely are they to be reflected in other parts of the country?

5.30 pm

The Government have got their priorities wrong. They are estimating negative growth in the economy for the next year. By implication at least, the Government are saying that, given the country's growth rate, unemployment will be a problem. Therefore the Government should be in a position to do something about it.

The something that they have done is to cut expenditure on training. That is not a minor point of detail which divides us, but an issue of principle. The Labour party's view is that expenditure on education and training will be crucial to our position in the international trading community in the next decade and will be a necessary element in pulling this country through the recession.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, whose speeches I always enjoy—especially the witty parts. Could he enlighten the House still further on his party's policy in this matter? He has just begun to talk about it. I seem to recall that his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that the increased expenditure on education and training which the Labour party hopes for would essentially be financed by borrowing rather than by taxation. Is that still the case? Has the hon. Gentleman made any estimates of the effect on interest rates, were that to happen?

Mr. Brown: Investment in training has to be a priority for the economy. Before the last Budget we did something that Oppositions do not normally do. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that we set out our own proposals for the Budget. They included the expenditure of about £800 million—if my memory is correct—on training, as well as the training levy; we proposed a 0·5 per cent. levy on the payroll, which we believed would generate more than £1·4 billion. We added the two figures together and said that that amount would be spent on training. Those measures were part of a package presented before the Budget.

When we come to office we shall have to measure our objectives against the changes that have been made in this year's Budget. We shall not come into office with the tax system that we endured last year or the year before. We shall certainly not be able to go back to where we were in 1979. Therefore, I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that we will definitely spend X amount and that, whatever the position of the economy, so much must be spent on training; nor can I say that rates of income tax will be Y rather than Z. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is not my prerogative to do so.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Come clean.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman says come clean, but, assuming that there will not be a general election before the next Budget day, which does not seem to be a very safe assumption, will he stand up and say what the basic rate of income tax will be after the next Budget?

Mr. Maude: I can certainly assure the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) that it is our intention to reduce the basic rate of income tax. I take issue with the hon. Gentleman over the fact that he is proposing to spend all that money without giving the slightest indication of where it will come from. The only conclusion we can draw from that is that if the Opposition were elected to government they would increase the basic rate of income tax, as all other Labour Governments have done.

Mr. Brown: I have this in common with the Financial Secretary—we both have good intentions and we are setting out the direction in which our tax policies intend to travel.

Mr. Maude: Yours are up and ours are down.

Mr. Brown: The Financial Secretary says that ours are up and theirs are down and he does not mistake the position, as we see it. We have made it very clear—it is one of the matters that are to be firmly established—that the top rate of income tax under a Labour Government would be 50 per cent. and not 40 per cent. We have said that we intend to introduce a banded system, although we have not said where the bands will sit. Clearly that would impinge upon the prerogative of a Chancellor. We regard the 50 per cent. rate as a firm pledge. Conservative Members argue that that is too much, but Opposition Members view it as trying to arrive at a consensus with top-rate earners. That figure would be the norm, would not move about from year to year, would endure and, in time, would probably be accepted by both Labour and Conservative Governments as a consensus.

The Financial Secretary has put his finger on the heart of the disagreement between us. Even this Government have benefited from economic growth, and if there are extra fruits to be distributed as a result of such growth, it is our view that the money should be invested in the economy in ways which stimulate further economic growth, especially on training the people of this nation. It should be invested in the work force. As the Financial Secretary has spelt out perfectly fairly, it is the Government's belief that the money should be spent on further direct tax cuts for high-rate and indeed basic-rate taxpayers.

I hope that the Financial Secretary does not disagree with that explanation, because it is at the heart of the disagreement between us. We think that the position of the British economy requires Government incentives to invest in the supply side. We regard training as a special priority.

I am surprised that that is thought to be controversial. It can only be thought so in the context in which the Financial Secretary puts it. There is such a breadth of disagreement between us on that matter that I think it will be a fundamental issue on which the next general election will be fought. We believe that a failure to invest could underpin the existing lack of skills and exacerbate the present situation. As a protest, I shall ask my hon. Friends

to join me in voting—if the Financial Secretary does not accept this amendment—to bring the starting date for this modest little relief forward to 1991. The Financial Secretary may well say that it cannot be afforded. However, if he says that even that expenditure cannot be afforded he is saying something very heavy about the Government's commitment to training and to expenditure on training.

Mr. Maude: In moving the amendment, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) has talked as if this measure, in the Budget and now in the Finance Bill, to introduce tax relief for people who pay for their training were the only thing that the Government are doing about training. Clearly that is not so. He has used the debate on this amendment to talk in general terms about training and about what the Government are doing or should be doing and what he believes could be done.

I shall deal first with the specific issue raised in the amendment—whether the relief could be brought forward a year to the 1991-92 tax year. The date has nothing to do with constraints on public spending. I see no need to apologise for exercising tough discipline on public spending, but that is not the concern in this case. There are overwhelming considerations of practicality.

One of the most important features of the relief is its delivery at source, which will allow it to extend not only to those who are working and could benefit from a conventional tax relief, but to those who do not have current taxable income. That feature will give the relief greater impact and flexibility. For a variety of reasons, relief at source requires a long run-in period. The regulations will need to be drafted and brought into force. Administrative systems will have to be designed and put in place. Those in colleges and institutions running the scheme will need to know precisely what to do. We are conscious that the providers of training will have some extra administrative work. We intend to consult widely on what would be the best and simplest scheme for them. We are already working hard on that.

The provision will take time to implement and it would be unrealistic to expect the new relief to begin before April of next year. Even that will impose a strict timetable, but I believe that it can and will be delivered. The delay will allow the accreditation process for the national vocational qualifications and the Scottish vocational qualifications to get further ahead, so that a more comprehensive coverage is available when the relief begins next year. Therefore, the Government are unable to accept the amendment.

The hon. Gentleman talks as though this were the only measure that we were taking on training.

Mr. Forman: Is it true that relief at source—which is the method that the Government have sensibly chosen—has the benefit of not discriminating against the self-employed if they wish to take advantage of the arrangements?

Mr. Maude: Certainly. A person who is self-employed will receive the tax relief at the time of making the payment for training, rather than waiting to obtain it when the final calculation of his tax is made.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East talked rather grudgingly about the measure, apparently because it encourages individuals. I do not take issue with what he said about the need to stimulate investment in training, to encourage it and to give incentives. That is precisely what we are doing. The measure provides an incentive for investment in training, including a direct incentive for individuals to provide training for themselves.

I freely confess that the measure does not form part of a great national scheme. There will not be a huge bureaucratic organisation or a national body to decide who should have what training. It will be for individuals to decide for themselves. That makes the hon. Gentleman uncomfortable. The Labour party's approach to training is based on compulsion. Why else would it propose a payroll levy in which every employer is forced to pay a levy for everyone who is employed, with all the bureaucratic paraphernalia that that would inevitably involve?

Mr. Brown: The Minister has a right to indulge in attacks on our payroll levy scheme—that is a matter of contention between the parties. He is entitled to make those points, but many employers have welcomed the scheme. Many employers who invest heavily in training will be beneficiaries under the scheme.

However, the hon. Gentleman is not entitled to say that we have given the substance of the clause a grudging welcome. We have not, but we believe that it is no substitute for a proper commitment to training from the Government. In its own little timid context, the proposal is welcome. It is so welcome that we are trying to introduce it a year earlier. We are not against it, because it helps the individual; I have no quarrel with that.

5.45 pm

Mr. Maude: I did not say that the hon. Gentleman was against the measure: I said that he was grudging about it. If describing it as a "little timid" measure is not being grudging, it would be interesting to know what is. That is hardly fulsome, whole-hearted praise. The hon. Gentleman hardly speaks like a man full of enthusiasm for the measure. I stand by what I said, and stand by my view that the Labour party is only interested in compulsion. It is only interested in training if people are made to do things. That is a sort of puritan ethic: it is good only if it is not enjoyable—if it is not what people want to do.

My mind goes back to the old days of compulsory levies and industrial training boards. There were many bodies, committees and national boards and, in theory anyway, much training was taking place. At the end of it, however, there was no great addition to the nation's stock of skills. We should be considering not how much is put into training, but what extra skills are acquired.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Minister is babbling on in a nonsensical way about training. Does he not realise that the compulsory training schemes were introduced by a Conservative Government, not by a Labour Government? Employers' organisations by the score welcomed them. Without those compulsory levies, many employers bitterly criticised those who poached their apprentices and other trained people after they had taken the time and energy to train them. Those employees were simply sucked away. Does the Minister agree with such practices?

Mr. Maude: I agree with those employers who warmly supported the ending of compulsory levies and the disbanding of the national bodies. In the past decade, the amount spent on worthwhile training for the enhancement of skills has increased dramatically.

[Mr. Maude]

I am not just referring to public spending, although I point out in passing that, for every £100 spent on training at today's prices by the last Labour Government, £250 is spent now. I am not talking only about that huge two-and-a-half-times increase in public spending on training. What matters more is the money spent by the private sector. Skills for business are what make a difference to the economy. Sometimes, the Labour party talks as though all that was needed was investment in plant, no matter what the plant was. The same applies to training: it does not matter what the skills are. Labour Members think that all that can be stirred together to make a vibrant economy. Anyone who deals with these matters knows that that is not so.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Was it not Mr. Robert Carr who introduced the Industrial Training Act 1964, which created the industrial training boards? The Minister should not denigrate those industrial training boards. Some of them provided people, especially young people, with first-class training.

Mr. Maude: I am sure that some first-class training was provided. The complaint was that skills were not being enhanced under the old compulsory system of training. We now have a system of training delivery which is employer-led, based locally, not nationally, with the emphasis on training and enterprise councils, which have been a remarkable success. They were in operation well in advance of the proposed timetable, and will make a huge difference. The emphasis will be on what comes out at the end.

The training programmes will focus heavily on qualifications and employment training will focus heavily on getting people jobs. That must be the test of whether training is successful. Youth training should lead to qualifications, and employment training should lead to employment. The funding of training and enterprise councils is designed to fulfil that objective, with a quarter of the funding related to output quality—whether the trainee achieves a job or a qualification.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister explain why, when we discuss training, hardly any mention is made of the training needs of employees and of our fellow citizens who suffer from physical and mental handicap? Why are they always at the end of the queue for employment training places?

Mr. Maude: I do not believe that to be the case. Ample provision for handicapped people is made within the £2·7 billion of public money which is spent each year on training and enterprise. I do not accept for a moment that they are at the end of the queue or that no thought is given to the trainees. The purpose of the measure we are discussing today is to give trainees an incentive to enhance their skills.

The amount of training being provided is increasing in a way that should win forthright and enthusiastic support across the Chamber. Each year, the private sector spends about £20 billion on training. That is excellent news. The training culture is improving hugely. There is no doubt that, in previous decades, many businesses considered training to be a low priority. We have paid a price for that in the past. There is no doubt that, in the recession in the early 1980s, spending on training by businesses fell. A good many businesses considered training to be dispensable. It is a source of considerable satisfaction that that does not appear to be happening in the current recession, although pressure on businesses' costs is intense.

The most recent economic situation report by the CBI, published last month, asked how much companies expected to spend on training and retraining in the next 12 months, and whether they expected to spend more, the same or less than they had spent in the past 12 months.

The outcome was most satisfactory and encouraging. At a time of recession, with intense pressure on costs, 26 per cent. expected to spend more, 49 per cent. expected to spend the same and only 18 per cent. expected to spend less. That means that the attitude toward training in the private sector has improved considerably. When the economy begins to move out of recession, businesses will be very much better placed to recover quickly, and their capacity to produce and to meet renewed demand will be greater than it was in the early 1980s. That bodes well for the future.

The Government have absolutely nothing to apologise for in their approach to training. Apart from the huge increase in public spending on training and enterprise, there has been an enormous improvement in the quality of training. We should be concerned about the output. What matters is not what the Government put in but what those who undergo the training get out of it. There is no doubt whatsoever about the quality of training.

I hope that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East will be big enough to accept that the quality of training in Britain is vastly better than it ever has been. With the introduction of the national system of vocational qualifications and the national network of locally based training and enterprise councils, with all their local links and local knowledge of what is needed and what can be provided, the quality of training is continually on the increase. I hope that, just for once, the hon. Gentleman will be big enough to accept that.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I have a letter from the Staffordshire training and enterprise council saying that

"it would be failing in its responsibilities to the local community if it did not highlight the fact that its adult training budget is totally inadequate for the current needs of the County."

I had a meeting with some of the trainees, who are halfway through their training programme and are now going to lose their places and be unable to take part in the vocational training that the Minister is so fond of quoting. What will he do for the people of Staffordshire who are losing out on his training schemes?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Lady refers to particular circumstances and budgets. I cannot comment on the circumstances of one particular training and enterprise council.

Mrs. Golding: Why? Is it too trivial?

Mr. Maude: No. It is not trivial at all, it is a matter of considerable concern, but every organisation paying for training in the public sector is subject to a budget. That is the case under this Government, just as it was under previous Governments.

It is worth making the point again that the budgets for training are substantially larger than they were under the

last Labour Government. For every £100 that the last Labour Government spent on training, we spend £250. I am delighted if many people are seeking training in Staffordshire; those people are very much better placed today than they would have been under the last labour Government.

Mrs. Golding: The supervisors who have been supervising trainees for many years are losing their jobs in Staffordshire because there is no room for them. Eventually the Staffordshire training and enterprise council will have to spend money on training new supervisors. It is a nonsensical programme and a waste of money.

Mr. Maude: No doubt the hon. Lady can raise that with the local training and enterprise council.

Mrs. Goulding: I have.

Mr. Maude: It is a matter for the TEC how it arranges its affairs locally, and no doubt it will do so.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): We should start by putting the debate into the context of the United Kingdom's appalling failure to train our young people compared with training in other countries. The Department of Education and Science statistical bulletin issued in January 1990 revealed that the United Kingdom has 35 per cent. of its 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education or training compared with, at the top of the range, 79 per cent. in the United States of America. At the middle of the range France trains nearly twice as many 16 to 18-year-olds. Those statistics show what a long way we have to go to provide a reasonable level of training in Britain.

The Minister referred to the quality of training provided through the training and enterprise councils. I would be the first to agree with him that some of the training provided by the TECs is of a higher quality than before, and that is certainly to be commended.

I should like to make a particular point about training in rural areas and the way in which TECs are coping with the requirements placed on them. I have a letter which has been sent out to trainers by the chief executive of Powys TEC, which is based in my constituency. That TEC started with a bang and is already doing good work. One of the problems in rural areas is that many trainees must travel great distances to their traineeships. The public transport —or rather the absence of it—in those areas is such that many trainees cannot take part in such schemes unless they take lodgings during the week.

6 pm

A case was brought to my attention last week of a young 16-year-old girl who had taken a training place with a veterinary surgery in a small town in my constituency. She has been working there successfully for five or six months and has been enjoying her training. Last week, she was told by the training agency that managed the scheme that her training would have to finish within seven days because it was no longer possible to meet the cost of her lodging in eastern Montgomeryshire, where she lodged during the week. She could not travel to work every day because her training place was 45 miles from her family home. No public transport was available and she was too young to drive, so there was no way in which the scheme could continue if the training agency kept to its decision.

Through the intervention of the chief executive of Powys TEC, that training agency was forced—I use that word advisedly—to change its mind and the girl was allowed to continue her training. That happened because her mother contacted me on the day the decision was made known and I contacted the chief executive on the same day. Action was then taken which many trainees would not have the initiative to take themselves.

There must be many trainees around the country, particularly in more heavily populated areas, who are losing their training places halfway through. As a result of that case and another which I shall mention in a moment, steps are being taken by Powys TEC to avert such problems in the future. However, just a few weeks ago, training for a number of ladies and, I believe, one man to provide a day nursery in Machynlleth was brought to an end at a stoke—almost without notice. It was summarily terminated after the expenditure of a large sum of money to provide the equipment and decorate the premises where the day nursery was to be situated. This was a much more difficult problem to handle because the training organisation concerned was losing money on the scheme.

The reaction of the chief executive of Powys TEC, Claire Coates, has been commendable. She has contacted every trainer and urged them to absorb travel and lodging costs where necessary. However, in a letter to them she had to say:

> "In the meantime, travel costs have been included in your contract price which will mean that you are likely to make a loss on some trainees' travel costs and gain. . .on others".

If any group of people understands the market and the balance sheet, it is the Government. What proportion of businesses are willing to make a loss on contractual arrangements? Most businesses, particularly small and medium-size trainers, will pull the plug on contractual arrangements on which they are losing money.

In this instance, it is not merely a matter of a decision not to supply widgets because an organisation cannot make a profit on them or to bring a bus service to an end despite the difficulties that that causes in rural areas. These decisions bring misery into people's lives. I therefore make a plea, on behalf of a rural area, to the Minister to look into the problem and to ask his right hon. and hon. Friends to ensure that training costs in rural areas are fully covered so that we do not run into the problems that were suffered by the young girl whom I mentioned.

Nevertheless, it is fair to give a measure of welcome to a proposal that encourages training. The Minister will expect me, as a Liberal Democrat from a long Liberal tradition, to welcome a measure that places the initiative in the hands of the trainee and lets the individual say, "I am going to better my prospects by choosing my own training scheme." That is an excellent idea.

It is also a good idea that, under the simple scheme that is proposed, tax relief at source will be provided. However, it is extremely disappointing—as has been emphasised by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, (Mr. Brown)—that tax relief will not become available until 1992. Will the Minister investigate whether tax relief could at least be provided in the current financial year on new courses in which new machinery and new office procedures are being set up anyway? Why cannot tax relief be provided at source to new trainees? Surely the Inland Revenue can cope with those administrative arrangements. A Government machine capable of introducing a 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT across the board in just a few

weeks should be able to manage the administrative procedure to introduce this new change—at least in part—in less than 14 months.

Will the Minister explain why the proposal is limited? Why does not it include national vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications at the highest level? Why does it discriminate against professional qualifications? Will it include relief for distance learning qualifications, such as those provided by the Open university and elsewhere? It should do so but does not.

The Government's measure may be wise but it is not generous. The cost of relief will be nil in 1991-92—the scheme is not yet effective—and will cost £20 million in 1992-93, including a public expenditure element of £5 million in respect of non-taxpayers. When the NVQs and SVQs are fully developed, the cost is expected to rise to £40 million, including a public expenditure element of £10 million. What is £10 million? How many yards of motorway can be unrolled for £10 million? It can probably be measured in hundreds of yards, but certainly not in miles. Surely the Government can find more than a mile or two of motorway to support training for national vocational qualifications. The Government should be funding training much more generously and considering a far more extensive scheme. There is nothing wrong with requiring companies to provide a small proportion of their payroll to train people between the ages of 16 and 19. We believe that, probably on the basis of asking too few or the wrong people, the Government have grossly overestimated industry's reaction.

The Government are particularly failing to support training for the unemployed to any reasonable extent, either in this proposal or elsewhere. Unemployment is increasing at an alarming rate. In the past three years, year on year, redundancies have increased. Today, we heard the shocking news that 3,000 people are to be made redundant from the aircraft division of Rolls-Royce. That is but one example of what is happening.

There is a catalogue of companies that are currently making people redundant. It includes Marks and Spencer and Rolls-Royce, which are at the top of the class in British industry. As an hon. Member from the Labour party said——

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): The hon. Member for Makerfield.

Mr. Carlile: Yes, the hon. Member for Makerfield may have his credit. The hon. Gentleman made a good point when he said that those companies are also major trainers.

Mr. McCartney: I always do.

Mr. Carlile: I will not accept that every point that the hon. Gentleman makes is good.

Major trainers are now making people redundant. This highlights the need for much greater support for training, particularly for those who become unemployed as a result of the Government's economic policies and their failure to introduce a real strategy for manufacturing industry. Last month's trade figures showed beyond doubt that imports are rising relative to exports. That tells its own story.

In the past, the quality of training schemes provided for the unemployed has not been good, as the poor attendance rates demonstrate. One cannot blame the trainees. If the training programmes were good enough, the trainees would turn up for them in much greater numbers. When unemployment fell and resources were freed, resources could have been used to increase the quality of training; but the Government simply cut the training budget in 1991-92 by £350 million.

Now that unemployment has begun to rocket again, the Government still continue to make insufficient provision. The recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Employment of another £120 million for the main training schemes operated by the training and enterprise councils not only failed to restore the cuts of last summer and preceding years but failed to allow for the size of the increases in unemployment. That funding failure is especially regrettable when TECs are attempting to establish themselves in the face of many functional difficulties, such as those I mentioned at the beginning of my speech.

We believe that extra resources should be devoted to starting the transformation of Government training schemes into quality programmes, which would be well regarded by participants and employers alike. The Minister referred to payroll requirements. Employers would not complain if they thought they were getting "value for money"—I believe that the Government understand that phrase. I support schemes that give value for money, as do, I believe, all responsible companies in this country. Many of those schemes could be provided by companies in-house, provided they met the requisite standard. That is the sort of philosophy that should be guiding the financing and devising of training schemes. I fear that, as yet, that philosophy has not led the Government's thinking.

6.15 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I welcome clause 31, which introduces new tax relief for vocational training. It recognises that it is not just the Government and employers who have responsibility for training, but individuals, and that it is right to give individuals some incentive to better themselves. The new tax relief, modest though it may be, is most welcome. I believe that, in future, it may cost more than the Treasury has estimated because there will be a wide take-up as people seek to take advantage of the new relief.

When I looked at amendment No. 14 I had some sympathy with the suggestion that the relief should be introduced immediately. After all, if it makes sense to introduce a new tax relief, we should make it available to taxpayers and others at the earliest opportunity. However, I understand that if we are to adopt the approach chosen by the Treasury, of allowing people to deduct the tax from payments that they make, it will not be practical to introduce such a change until the beginning of the next tax year. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that adopting that approach would allow non-taxpayers as well as taxpayers to take advantage of the relief. That is welcome and I was interested to hear the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) say that that part of the proposal will cost £5 million, which is a lot of money. After all, we are talking of £5 million of relief, so that means £20 million of expenditure by individuals with no taxable income. That seems quite a lot of money, and if the Treasury is right, I welcome the fact that people without a taxable income will

spend on training at that rate to improve their chances of acquiring taxable income—that is what the proposal is all about.

Another advantage to the approach adopted by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is that relief is available immediately, both to taxpayers and non-taxpayers. It is not necessary for them to pay the fees and then wait for a considerable period before receiving tax relief. The alternative would be simply to make the relief an allowable expense, so that there would either have to be an adjustment to people's PAYE codes, which would be difficult, or people would have to wait until the end of the tax year before they could claim back the money. The Treasury have adopted the right approach, and I note that it has adopted the same one in relation to a number of new tax reliefs. I accept that it means that we cannot introduce the relief until 1992 because we must set in place the necessary arrangements, introduce regulations and ensure that the people to whom the money is being paid are able to get the tax back from the Treasury.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said that we should ask whether training should be a priority for public spending. Earlier this week, I received a leaflet from Battersea Labour party, which stated that the priorities for a Labour Government would be a massive increase in spending on education and training, and on public transport. Leaving aside the question of where the money will come from and other such issues —although it is important to recognise that both those proposals, however commendable, have long lead times in terms of improving the country's economic performance —it is nonsense to say that we can make an investment on day one and achieve economic growth on day two.

I recall saying in a debate in the House late last year that one reason why the performance of British management had improved during the 1980s was the expansion of university education in the 1960s. There are long lead times on investment in education and training. The Labour party is misleading the country if it is suggesting that the increased investment in education and training will, overnight, lead to an improvement in our economic performance. I am afraid that life is not like that. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) must answer the question: "How does she square that circle?" I think that she and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) have both said on many occasions that their first priorities for public spending would be to increase pensions and child benefit and that all other increases in public expenditure would have to wait until we had improved our economic performance. They tell us that in one breath and then, in the next one, they say that, in order to improve our economic performance, we must have a massive increase in investment in education and training, transport infrastructure and all sorts of other things. Whom are we to believe? Perhaps we shall have a better idea when we have had a chance to read the text of the speech that the Leader of the Opposition is making on this subject today

Apparently the right hon. Gentleman will tell us that, under Labour, there would be no tax reductions for five years. He assumes—I hope that hon. Members will note this—that, come what may, we shall have economic growth of 2·5 per cent. per year. Clearly, he has decided in advance how the extra £20 billion of tax revenue generated by the economic growth would be spent.

People are naturally very suspicious of the Labour party when it comes to questions of taxation. Indeed, they would do well not to listen to the Opposition. On that score, of course, there is cause for considerable concern, as the Labour party has already told us that it would increase the burden on many taxpayers. But people would do even better to look at the performance of all past Labour Governments, who increased the burden not only on higher-rate taxpayers, but on all taxpayers. In the end, there is only one way in which the extra £20 billion of expenditure to which the Opposition are committed could be funded, and that is by putting an extra burden on every taxpayer.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: On the question of increasing the tax burden on ordinary citizens, can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Conservative Government, throughout their time in office, have done exactly that?

Mr. Smith: What I can confirm is that over the past 12 years the Conservative Government have managed to reduce the standard rate of tax from 33 to 25 per cent. and, at the same time, achieve substantial growth in public spending. That is a very remarkable achievement. At the next election, people will judge the various promises according to past performance.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: No doubt the hon. Gentleman is aware of the system of indirect taxation, which accounts for part of the tax burden on citizens of average and below-average means. Will he confirm that the Conservative party has increased, rather than decreased, the total tax burden borne by ordinary citizens?

Mr. Smith: What people will want to consider is net take-home pay. During the Conservative Government's period of office, a married man on average earnings and with two children has seen an increase of more than 30 per cent. in his net take-home pay. By contrast, the performance of the last Labour Government over a period of five years resulted in an increase of just 1 per cent. in the net take-home pay of such a person. What people are concerned about is net take-home pay. That is where the Conservative Government have scored, and where Labour Governments will never score. It is in that context that people will set the speech that, apparently, the Leader of the Opposition is to make today. People have not forgotten what life was like 15 years ago under a Labour Government. It was a very unpleasant experience, and not one which people will want to repeat. The present Government have cut tax and have increased spending.

Investment in training is another priority for the Labour party, but anyone reading the Labour party document that was published a couple of weeks ago will find that it is full of priorities. There is an endless list of priorities, together with an endless list of new Government bodies to spend the money that implementing them will require. Every priority will involve additional public expenditure, and there will be a new quango to do the spending. On the question of training, it is entirely wrong to assume that quantity is in itself a virtue. The quality of investment is equally, if not more, important. That is a matter upon which this debate ought to focus.

A better means of securing increased investment in training is to improve the profitability of British industry. Whether we are concerned about fixed investment, about investment in research and development, or about

[Mr. Smith]

investment in training, the way to achieve increased investment is to increase the profitability of British industry. Over the past 10 years, we have seen a huge increase in industrial profitability and, as a result, a huge increase in retained profits. That is why there has been a better performance in terms of investment in training.

The CBI forecast figures that have just been given by the Financial Secretary are very encouraging. It is remarkable that, in the middle of a recession, so many companies should contemplate increasing their expenditure on training or, at least, not reducing it. Clearly, when profitability improves next year—as it will—there will be an increase in training budgets. Employer-led training is so much better. The key is to ensure that training is of the kind that employers want, the kind that makes trainees employable. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has talked about the training of disabled people. I agree that that should be no less a priority than is the training of able-bodied people. Indeed, it is a very important aspect of the whole matter.

Dr. Godman: I cannot speak about the situation in England and Wales, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, in Scotland, the numbers and percentages of people with a mental or physical handicap who underwent employment training in each of the past two years were dismally low. Indeed, that was conceded in a recent answer by the Scottish Office Minister who is responsible for industry.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Interesting as these exchanges are, I must point out that the Committee is dealing with a very specific date, which is mentioned in the amendment. I should like hon. Members to return to that, rather than engage in a general debate on training matters.

Mr. Smith: I have to accept what you say, Miss Boothroyd, although the debate has ranged very widely. I fully accept that we are discussing a specific tax relief, which involves public expenditure, but hon. Members have been putting that item of public expenditure in the context of the resources committed to training, whether by the Government, by way of taxpayers' money, or by the private sector. Of course, every tax relief has a public expenditure cost. I intended to refer to a particular example of the training of disabled people, but I shall abide by your ruling, Miss Boothroyd, and return to the amendment. Let me say simply that this new tax relief to encourage individuals to better themselves and to enable them to choose training is very welcome, and when it comes into force in 1992 it will be very popular.

Dr. Godman: I support the amendment, as I believe that it would improve a modest measure. It is surprising that, in relation to training bodies, the Minister should have been so dismissive. I have always regarded the Act that established those bodies as being one of the finest pieces of legislation passed, under the stewardship of Mr. Robert Carr, by the then Conservative Government. It made training provision for very many people. The legislation was passed many years before you, Miss Boothroyd, became a Member of Parliament, and a few years before I came here.

I do not want to incur your wrath today—or, for that matter, any day—but I have to say that, like the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who spoke on behalf of the Liberals, I have reservations arising from the Government's failure to make provision for distance learning. This is particularly regrettable in respect of information technology training, which can be provided by, among various institutions, the Open university.

Distance learning programmes are very important for would-be trainees in many parts of Scotland, particularly the highlands and islands and the Shetlands. I think that I am right in saying that the Open university has in the Shetland islands alone several hundred students who undoubtedly benefit from its unparalleled teaching.

6.30 pm

Can the Minister tell us why Scottish vocational qualifications at the highest level are being excluded? It means that the Scottish higher national diploma is being excluded. I know trainees who are studying for such qualifications. If the amendment were passed, others could benefit.

I am sorry that there is to be a delay in the introduction of a provision which could help many of my constituents. May I remind the Minister that, according to Government statistics, the unemployment rate in the Greenock travel to work area is 13·5 per cent., which is far above the levels of unemployment in constituencies represented by Conservative Members? It is certainly much higher than the national average.

When we talk about the training of young people, may I point out to the Committee that just yesterday Kvaerner-Kincaid of Greenock announced the redundancies of more than 100 employees, most of whom are highly skilled engineers, but who include 12 apprentices? When employers engage apprentices to undergo training, they have a moral obligation to ensure that the apprenticeships are completed. Kvaerner-Kincaid is acting irresponsibly, even immorally, in putting the apprenticeships under threat.

Nothing is worse for a young person of 17, 18 or 19 than to have an apprenticeship disrupted. Where can he go? I say "he" because I am talking about 12 young men who are deeply anxious about their future. What are their prospects if the Norwegian company has its disgraceful way and puts them into the dole queue? I told the chief executive, Mr. Hanna, yesterday that it was a disgraceful state of affairs. If the apprentices are put out of work, it will be nothing short of a scandal.

My constituency and other areas in the west of Scotland are suffering badly because of the lack of systematic training, particularly in electronics and in information technology. That is a matter for regret. If the Government were to accept the amendment, it would make a modest provision much more sensible for many of the people whom I represent north of the border.

Mr. Cryer: I want to comment on the Minister's reasons for rejecting our useful and modest attempt to improve the modest provisions of clause 31. The Minister said that there were administrative difficulties because regulations need to be drafted. I am surprised that the Government are admitting that they are introducing primary legislation without a thought for the regulations which will flow from it. According to the Minister, the Government have not troubled to look through the Bill to see what regulations will be needed.

The Minister said that there would be enormous difficulties about consultation. The Government use consultation when they want to and dismiss it when they do not. The Minister is contemptuous of training boards. When the clothing industry training board was told that there would no longer be a compulsory levy to fund it, there was no consultation. The Government did not ask members of the board what they would do about providing training in an area where we have to be competitive. They simply said, without consultation, that there would be no levy. The Minister chose his arguments to suit himself. There was no question of consultation.

I must reiterate my concern about the machinery of government. We have a slapdash Government who do not know what they are doing from one week to the next. They are so dithering in their attitude that they have not gone through the Bill to check what regulations will be needed to enable tax concessions to be made. It is not a question of whether the Government will get the measure through the Committee. They have a majority of 150 so they know that they will get the legislation through.

The Minister said that regulations will need to be drafted. It would have been prudent for the Minister to ask his officials, when drafting the Bill, to consider what regulations would be needed. Will the regulations be made under the affirmative procedure or will they be less important in the Minister's eyes? Has he made a judgment? Has he decided just to dig out regulations at some time in the future, some to be made by affirmative resolution and some by negative resolution?

These are important questions, because most provisions are created not by primary legislation but by secondary legislation, through powers delegated to Ministers. Therefore, Ministers should regularly assess the regulations that will be necessary. It is not as though the Treasury is unaware of the need to produce regulations. Even when tax concessions concern other Departments, the regulations have to be drawn up with the consent of the Treasury.

The Government have rooms full of people dealing with regulations, yet the Minister tries to tell the House that they cannot draft regulations quickly. It is incredible. I will lay a bet with the Minister that there are five times as many people in Government Departments drafting regulations as there are in the emergency unit dealing with relief for the Bangladesh victims. There may even be 10 times more people involved in drafting regulations, because there are only about a dozen officials grappling with one of the biggest disasters that the planet has seen, in which perhaps as many as 500,000 people have been killed.

The Minister's argument about regulations does not wash; he has used it as an excuse. He could have accepted our amendment, brought forward regulations and introduced the provisions in this financial year. An element of retrospection might have been needed, but I have never been one of those who says that there should be a bar against retrospective legislation under any circumstances.

The Government want to induce people to enter into vocational education. That is necessary. We are not grudgingly accepting the notion, as the Minister tried to suggest. We are urging the Minister to ask his civil servants to get cracking on the regulations so that the legislation may be brought into operation in this financial year. What could be better? The Minister is getting support for a Bill which is mostly pretty awful, but at least the regulations would help people. We are supporting the Government, but the Minister says no, it is administratively impossible, because the Government have never introduced legislation in 24 hours, never introduced regulations, plonked them before Parliament and brought them into effect during the 40 days within which a prayer can be tabled. We know that that is not true. They have used administrative expediency when they wanted to and when there was the political will to do so. There is not the political will to encourage people to undertake vocational training.

Why is it especially urgent for people to undertake training? It is urgent because some manufacturing industries are in difficulty, and people might need an additional inducement to encourage them to undertake training in view of the relatively dismal prospects for some of those manufacturing industries.

Let us take the example of engineering. New car registrations are down by about 20 per cent. The fall in registration in cars manufactured in this country has enormous repercussions. It means that component suppliers such as GKN have shed people and created redundancies because of the downturn caused by the Government's economic policies. The suppliers of steel and tyres and of cloth for the upholstery in cars and other vehicles are all affected by the downturn in demand, which has been created by the Government's blind and foolish ideological adherence to the use of interest rates alone to control the economy. As a result, more people have joined the dole queue. Therefore, there must be some inducements to encourage young people to go into the engineering industry, which is one of our most vital manufacturing industries.

The inducements should be on the premise that there might be an upturn—not under this Government, but after the next election. With a Labour Government and a decent attitude towards the economy, we shall create jobs, not destroy them. People will then have more confidence, but not at the moment. Therefore, inducements to enter an industry that faces difficulties will be a help.

The textile industry is important in Bradford. Fourteen thousand jobs depend directly on that industry. It is not an antique industry—it has invested and modernised—but it faces uncertainty, again because of the downturn in demand. There is much short-time working and a continuing trickle of redundancies. I predict that over the next few months mills will close in Yorkshire and the west riding because of the Government's economic policies and also because the textile industry in particular bore much of the burden of the perfectly legitimate sanctions against Iraq. The Gulf war meant that the market diminished in the middle east, which had been a fairly lucrative market for British textile manufacturers.

People might ask why they should go into the textile industry when it has been contracting for years, and over the past 10 years has lost at least 100,000 jobs in its woollen sector. Why should they go into an industry to learn a craft or a skill only to find that, at the end of the day, they are redundant and that the skill is not required?

The tax concession is needed now to counteract the economic downturn—the recession or slump—which the Government's policies have introduced once again into our economy.

6.45 pm

It makes more sense to give tax concessions now to encourage people to go on a training course than to spend the money on the dole queues. Although Ministers are shy about telling us the cost of the dole queues, they cost between £20,000 million and £25,000 million a year in unemployment payments, various other benefits and loss of tax revenue. The Minister can correct me and give an accurate Treasury figure, but it is far better to start this year with the modest tax concession outlined in the amendment to encourage people to go into training rather than for the Government to shrug their shoulders and say, "It is administratively impossible—we can't do it now," while the dole queues grow ever longer.

The Minister mentioned the cost of training in relation to Government expenditure. I should like to probe the figures a little further. He said that the Government were already spending that sort of money, so the amendment was not necessary. If the Government are so concerned about training, I wonder whether the figures that he gave for Government expenditure on training include expenditure on the skill centres. I presume that the tax concession would be available to an individual who decided that he wanted to go on a course at such a centre, but what has happened to the skill centres?

The Minister may not be aware—as he is from the Treasury, he should be—that the centres were a nationwide network run by the Department of Employment to provide training, but what did the Government do? They advertised them for sale, saying that they were making a loss, that they were not effectively run—although the loss was not so big—and that something had to be done about them..

It was strange that the Government sold the centres —in fact, they did not sell them but gave them away—to the people who were already in charge of running them at a loss. I wonder whether that money is incorporated into the Government's figures. The Government gave the new concern not only about £100 million, but the freehold. The new concern—Astra Training Services, in the main—has been busy closing down the centres, sacking people and diminishing training opportunities. It has sacked about 500 people—the Minister can correct me if he has up-to-date figures. It has been one of the biggest rip-offs of the privatisation procedures, and they have all been rip-offs of the taxpayer to some extent.

As the Minister knows, the sale is being investigated by the Public Accounts Committee. I hope that its report will be produced pretty speedily, because we are dealing with a huge gift of money to Astra Training Services and with the three civil servants who got into the Minister's good books, pulled out a plum and said, "What a good boy am I." That is an Elizabethan poem based on the corruption of Government in that era. The amount of money that would be provided by the tax concession is peanuts compared to the amount of money that the Government squandered on Astra Training Services and on giving away the freehold of important training facilities and sites.

I hope that the Minister has a few answers, that he will rise to the occasion and say that the Government have many facilities and lots of skilled draftsmen for regulations, that they will draw up plans and regulations, send round a circular and ensure that the minor tax concession is introduced in this financial year. The Minister has the opportunity to do that and to do a bit for people who want to take advantage of training. We encourage him in that, and I hope that he will accept the amendment. My guess is that he will not, but people who are looking for training will know where the real concern for training lies—not with the Government, but with Labour. We want an early opportunity in government to put our plans into action.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The Financial Secretary sought to deflect criticism of the Government's measure by saying that it was not all that the Government were doing on training. That is a statement of the obvious. But the proposed £20 million in tax relief on training costs is a drop in the ocean compared with the £245 million that has been cut from employment training and youth training this year. It is a tiny droplet compared with the £1·5 billion cut from public spending on training during the five years from 1987 to 1992.

The Government's proposal does not even begin to address the skills gap in Britain. In particular, it does not address the dilemma and the problems faced by women trainees. Women should be a prime target for any training scheme, especially in view of demographic trends which are causing a shortage of adult men and making it necessary to bring more women into the labour market. Many women do not have the qualifications to take advantage of the jobs that companies need to fill. Others who would like to return to the labour market after a period of caring for dependants but need to top up their skills to take advantage of opportunities are unable to do so. The measure does not even begin to address that problem.

Under the clause, there will be a deduction on the basic rate of tax, so those who pay a higher rate of tax will receive much greater relief. As women represent a small proportion of those in the higher tax bands, almost no women will benefit. In addition, the tax deduction will be available to non-taxpayers only in the form of a reduction in the cost of their training place. Many women who are on low pay cannot afford the massive cost that is often levied for a place on a training scheme.

The main beneficiaries of the proposal will be people who are already in work. They will be mainly professional people. Not many will be women and few will be low-paid workers. That should be considered against the background of the overall impact of the proposal. It is a molehill of a measure compared with the mighty mountain of the skills crisis in industry and across the economy. At present, 60 per cent. of trainees emerge without any qualifications and two thirds of our work force have had no training in the past three years. Many have had no training in their entire working lives.

The Financial Secretary referred to the rosy picture painted by the Confederation of British Industry by drawing selectively on its forecasts. I invite him to come back into the real world. For example, in west Wales, training places have been halved through the measures taken by the Government in the past year. One example is at a successful company called Kenyons in the town of Pontadarwe in the Neath constituency, which has trebled its turnover in the past two years. It builds industrial refrigeration plants and provides building services. It is a skilled engineering company employing 500 people in that part of the world. It is just the sort of company that we should encourage. In the past few months, its youth

training places have been cut from 90 to 70, despite the fact that the company had the places and people wished to fill them. The funding was cut by 20 places.

Only after the managing director created merry hell, as he described it, was the company able to win from the local training authority an additional 10 places. Similarly, employment training places in that company were cut from 30 to 18. Again, that opened up a skills gap even though the company had the opportunity and the desire to fill it. All that is in an area where we desperately need engineering skills in order to compete with foreign companies, which are rapidly taking over our markets. I have been approached by business men in Neath who want to provide places for computer training, which is desperately needed in our information technology society. The funding for those places is not available.

Several of my hon. Friends mentioned the lack of training opportunities for people with special needs. Training places for people with special needs have also been cut. All in all, the measure does not address the real world. The £20 million tax relief for training which is being provided one way or another should be compared to the £1·1 billion of tax subsidies for personal pensions last year and the incitement to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme in the form of a £6 billion tax subsidy. The £20 million does not even begin to measure up to the needs of our economy.

The £20 million can also be compared to the tax subsidies to encourage people to take more and more shares and invest more in equities; yet in the past 10 years it has been highly profitable for individuals to invest in shares. People have received an annual gross return of 19 per cent. on their investments. Why is money spent in that direction when it should be spent on funding the training that we so desperately need?

The Financial Secretary complained that the Labour party's policy was one of compulsion. That is not the case. The Government have abandoned their responsibilities for training and their duty to fund and provide the training opportunities so desperately needed in the economy. The Government have washed their hands of those responsibilities. The Labour party says that the Government should fulfil their responsibilities and duties to people who want to train to fill the skills gaps that are appearing everywhere. The Financial Secretary appeared to suggest that he would leave it all to the private sector. But almost universally the private sector is not filling the skills gap. I would ask why the directors of large companies pay themselves 22·7 per cent. increases in their remuneration when they are not providing the funding for training places that we need?

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) childishly suggested that we claimed that we could accomplish overnight the training revolution that is needed in Britain. No one claims that. The Labour party has never maintained that that would be the case, but we are saying that the Government are paying lip service to addressing the skills desert in society. People see, even if Ministers do not, that the Conservative party is a party of quick buck predators devouring our skills base as they asset-strip the economy. Labour is the party of enterprise and industry which is prepared to invest in skills for a strong economy.

Mr. Maude: This short debate has been essentially about the proposal in the Finance Bill to introduce tax relief on vocational training for individuals. The debate has ranged more widely than that, into training in general, and I welcome that.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) spoke as if the administrative difficulties of putting the scheme into place this year were pure fabrication and a figment of our imagination. He talked as if in the Government there was a sort of regulation factory—if one pressed a button, out would come a set of all-purpose regulations to fit any set of circumstances immediately. However, we are introducing a new scheme which must work. Nothing like it has been done before. The scheme must be relatively as simple as possible for training providers to operate. It must not impose too great a compliance burden on them.

It is important that we should get the regulations right, so that the system works in the best way possible. It would be dead easy to produce very quickly regulations which were wrong. I prefer to make sure that we get things right and that training providers have the time to set their systems in place and operate them. There is no doubt that to apply the system in this way—tax relief at source—places a burden on training providers. That is part of the price for what everyone has accepted to be a worthwhile measure.

As I said at the outset, the reason for deferring the implementation of the scheme until next year is that we are anxious to get it right and do not want to introduce it in a way that would be impossible for training providers. In those circumstances, I am not able to accept the amendment.

7 pm

Several points, including those raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), related to the ambit of the measure—which vocational qualifications would be within it. That is the subject of a further amendment that we shall debate before long, and I shall deal with it then. However, I shall now deal with the specific point that the hon. Gentleman raised about higher national diplomas. Most higher national diplomas—this applies particularly to England and Wales; I cannot say whether it applies to the same extent to Scotland—would be at level 4 and therefore included within the ambit of the provision. Perhaps we can deal with that matter in a little more detail in the context of a later amendment.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the provision of training for people with disabilities. Training and enterprise councils are obliged to provide suitable training which meets the needs of local employers and local people, which of course includes those with special training needs. Performance-related funding for this year will reward training and enterprise councils for achievement of employment outcomes for people with special training needs, including people with disabilities. It is by no means the case that people with handicaps are at the end of the queue, with no consideration being given to their needs.

Mrs. Golding: Will that include adult low achievers, many of whom in my constituency have lost their places midway through their training programmes?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Lady will understand that that is not something for which I have direct ministerial responsibility. I imagine that it includes people in those

[Mr. Maude]

circumstances, but it will be for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to provide detailed answers.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow referred to distance learning. Distance learning will be included if it leads to a national vocational qualification at levels 1 to 4.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery made much of the relatively low financial cost of this measure —almost as though that were something that the Government could automatically increase to make it a bigger and more spendid programme. I am bound to say that it is not a cash-limited programme. The figures in the Red Book—the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" —simply reflect the best estimate of demand for tax relief under the scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who is unable to be present because of an obligation elsewhere, believes that the cost could be more because demand would be greater. That may be the case, but it is simply an estimate of what demand is likely to be.

A number of other hon. Members referred slightingly to the cost. The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) described it as a molehill or a drop in the ocean. I am not sure whether he also said that it was chickenfeed, but someone has described it as chickenfeed. Of course, in the context of the entirety of the Government's training programme and training strategy, it is a relatively modest measure. It is not meant to be the kingpin of the exercise.

As I said, the Government are spending £2·7 billion overall, which is two and a half times as much as was spent on training in 1979. In that context, the measure is relatively modest—I make no apology for that—but it is particularly valuable because it places the emphasis on individuals' choice, encourages them and provides a direct incentive to enhance their skills.

In those circumstances, I am confident that the Committee will warmly support the measure and accept that it is not possible to bring forward its implementation in the way that has been suggested, for reasons which are good and will be understood.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. McWilliam. It is a great pleasure for me not only to see you in the Chair but to hope that it means that you will follow our deliberations Upstairs as well. It would be a great pleasure for me if a fellow Member of Parliament for Tyne and Wear joined me in the early hours of the morning as we considered the Finance Bill.

If you join me and the Financial Secretary for breakfast on Wednesday and Friday mornings during the passage of the Finance Bill, you may find the Financial Secretary a hard man to help and a hard man to please. Yesterday, he complained that I was smiling and nodding as he was speaking, and today he complains that I am grudging and curmudgeonly in my welcome for the clause. There is nothing grudging in our welcome. Most certainly, we are not opposed to it, because it gives some choice to those who are fortunate enough to be able to take advantage of its provisions. Those arguments are not the basis of our reservations.

I notice that, in defending the Government's case, the Financial Secretary came up with his version of events under the previous Labour Government. That is becoming commonplace. The Conservative party is not willing to have the events under the previous Labour Government taught as history in schools, but nevertheless it turns up time after time as fiction in our debates.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) rightly pointed out, circumstances were quite different under the previous Labour Government. We had training boards, apprenticeships, a manufacturing base and a balance of payments in equilibrium—things that we do not see nowadays. I was saddened to hear what my hon. Friend had to say about the very last of Britain's marine engineering industry. I followed the slow retreat of that industry from Wearside to Tyneside and then up to my hon. Friend's constituency. It is very sad to hear of the plight of young apprentices.

Dr. Godman: It is not just a matter of job losses in such a highly skilled sector. The decision announced yesterday could lead to the end of the building in the United Kingdom of slow-speed marine diesel engines—in other words, no building of diesel engines for merchant ships in the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am aware of the extent of the tragedy to which he refers, which is why I made a special point of mentioning it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) picked up the Minister on his main excuse for not accepting the help that we offer him—that it is difficult to make regulations. Are regulations required? Clause 31(2) states:

> "The payment shall be deducted from or set-off against the income of the individual for the year of assessment in which it is made; but relief under this subsection shall be given only on a claim made for the purpose, except where subsections (3) to (5) below apply."

Clause 31(4) states:

> "An individual who is entitled to such relief in respect of a payment may deduct and retain out of it an amount equal to income tax on it at the basic rate for the year of assessment in which it is made."

Surely the clause does not require further regulations. It would, of course, be desirable from the taxpayers' point of view if a MIRAS-type arrangement were in place, but that is not necessary. Under the clause, it would be possible to make a start this year. The argument about the technical difficulties and about the need for regulations is so much bunkum. In any case, what does the Minister expect the initial take-up to be?

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) made a very good point about the difficulties of those who would not have a charge to tax, many of whom would be women, but who might nevertheless want to take advantage of the relief. I find it difficult to accept that many citizens would be in that position—that many people would not have a charge offsetable against tax but nevertheless would have enough money to sustain the financial burden of undertaking such a course.

Having said that, however, and having done my very best to help the Minister, the real issue that divides us is not the clause, or even the Minister's unwillingness to accept our modest amendment, which has been tabled with entirely helpful intentions; our real quarrel with the Government is their failure to establish the properly funded training programme that is so necessary for the country. It is for those reasons that I seek to put our amendment to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—
The Committee divided: Ayes 172, Noes 223.

Division No. 138] **[7.11 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas

McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stokes, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 21, line 27, at end insert

'; provided that subsection (1)(d) above shall not apply so as to deny relief under this section for the excess (if any) of the payment over the amount of public financial assistance which the individual either has received or is entitled to receive at the time the payment is made'.

The amendment and amendments Nos. 15 and 17, which we shall debate later, explore matters of detail in clause 31, the principles of which we have already debated. Will it be possible to make some concession to those who wish to take advantage of this relief and who receive some assistance from public funds? The circumstances that I specifically envisage are those in which some assistance from public funds is provided but the assistance is not up to the value of the tax relief. I do not propose that tax relief should be granted on that proportion of expenditure that is assisted from public funds. However, I should be interested to hear the Financial Secretary's view about providing tax relief on the balance because, given the nature and size of some awards, such a situation could arise, and it seems against the spirit of the legislation to disadvantage someone in that position.

Mr. Maude: The amendment would allow trainees in receipt of direct assistance also to get relief for any part of the cost for a qualifying course which was not covered by that assistance. The main financial help for people undertaking vocational training is provided by their employers who, typically, meet the whole cost so that the trainee has nothing to find. Generally speaking, there is no tax penalty for such support, provided it is totally related to the current job, as it normally would be.

Many other trainees can benefit from a variety of Government programmes carefully designed and targeted at specific groups. Young people benefit from youth training and training vouchers and those who have been unemployed for a long time benefit from employment training. The new relief provided by the clause contrasts with both state and employer funded training in being aimed at those people who embark on vocational training on their own initiative and at their own expense. Such people would include mothers who wanted to return to the job market after having families or someone in work who wanted to retrain for a different career.

Acceptance of the amendment would mean that those who receive public support for undertaking qualifying courses, but only such courses, would get a double amount of help. The clause simply aims to ensure that everyone who embarks on a course for a national vocational qualification can get some help. We shall look carefully at the schemes of public financial support to be included in the Treasury regulations, by virtue of which relief would not be available. When we frame those regulations, I shall take careful account of views that have been expressed. Essentially, the matter can be dealt with in the context of the regulations to be issued on the clause, and I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am grateful to the Minister. It is not our intention, through the amendment, to give people twice the help that they would otherwise receive, and I do not think that the amendment is framed in that way. It is our intention to allow someone who has had some help from elsewhere to claim tax relief on the remainder of his expenditure. I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for taking that issue on board and agreeing to look at it when the regulations are being drafted. That was a helpful assurance and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 15, in page 22, line 12, after 'entitled', insert

'; provided however that no tax shall be required to be so accounted for to the Board by the person to whom the payment was made if that person can show (i) that he took all reasonable steps to satisfy himself that the individual in question was entitled to relief under this section and (ii) that at the date the payment in question was made he had complied with any obligation imposed on him by any regulations made under section (32) below'.

This is an exploratory amendment designed to discover whether the Financial Secretary, when he drafts the regulations, will safeguard the position of colleges that have acted in good faith, but which could find themselves laid open to a charge if they have been duped by a student who has not acted in good faith.

It seems unfair that an obligation to the Exchequer could fall on a college in those circumstances and the amendment will cover that point. The amendment sets out some conditions. It is not sufficient for a college to say that

it has acted in good faith; it must be able to demonstrate it. If the Financial Secretary says that the point will be dealt with in the regulations, I shall be satisfied.

7.30 pm

Mr. Maude: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the concern expressed in the amendment, though understandable, is unnecessary. The regulations seek to protect training providers from having to repay any relief at source granted to a person who did not qualify for relief if the training provider took reasonable steps to satisfy himself that the relief was legitimate.

The regulations will be aimed primarily at trainees who, after beginning a course, have their fees repaid to them. Equally, it is the case that the subsidy should be repaid to the Exchequer, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would quarrel with that.

There would be no requirement on the person granting the relief at source to undertake any arduous checking of claimants, and we would not expect those providing training to compensate the Revenue for false claims made by trainees. I hope that that covers the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Financial Secretary's remarks entirely satisfy me. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 17 in page 22, leave out lines 36 and 37.

It is nice to learn from the Financial Secretary that the regulations are a little further advanced than my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) might have thought when he contributed to an earlier debate.

Amendment No. 17 explores two slightly different matters. The first is the failure of the Government's scheme to offer tax relief at the highest levels offered by the two vocational training councils. I have received a letter—I expect that other hon. Members will have received similar correspondence—from the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants asking why clause 31 does not make relief available for all levels of training, including that leading to professional qualifications. The association is not the only group to have raised this point. The Financial Secretary mentioned it earlier and I refer to it in a neutral way because it needs to be clarified. The amendment is a probing one to seek such clarification.

My second point is one of detail and I am sure that the Financial Secretary will be able to satisfy me on it. It has been suggested to me that tax relief at the lower level might be clawed back or denied if a student went on to the higher levels of vocational training which do not attract tax relief. I suspect that it is not the Government's intention to claw back or deny such relief, but I hope that the Financial Secretary will set the matter straight.

Dr. Godman: Earlier the Financial Secretary gave some details of the English qualifications that the clause covered. Will he assure me that he will seek to determine the likely effect on the equivalent Scottish qualifications by approaching his ministerial colleagues at the Scottish Office in the usual way? I do not want to see Scottish students or trainees disadvantaged in any way vis-à-vis their English counterparts. I should be grateful if the Financial Secretary, perhaps at a later date, could give me that assurance.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) asked about professional qualifications and I too received a letter from the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants. I do not know what the situation is now, but when I qualified as an accountant many employers paid for training. However, my employer did not, and I had to pay for my training out of my taxed income. I am not asking for retrospective legislation to cover my case 21 years ago, but there is a case for extending tax relief to students who have to pay fees out of their taxed income.

Mr. Maude: I am grateful for the way that the points have been raised. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) is right to say that the matter has aroused some interest and I am glad to have the opportunity to deal with it.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) was concerned that the Scottish qualifications included in the scheme should be on all-fours with the English and Welsh ones. I cannot imagine that that will not be the case, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is aware of the hon. Gentleman's point. If necessary, we shall clarify the matter.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East asked about the possible clawback if a trainee moved from level one to level five. I can assure him that that would not happen.

Let me explain why we have chosen to include simply qualifications from level one to level four. National vocational qualifications and Scottish vocation qualifications will cover a wide range of vocational skills across most industrial groups, based on employer-defined standards of competence and performance. That will mean that the schemes are flexible and that the qualifications will be properly targeted. That will guarantee the success of the qualifications.

The structure of both schemes is to have qualifications that extend to jobs at all levels within particular industries. Level one covers most manual work and similar skills for each kind of job and level four broadly applies to supervisory middle management and technical skills. Levels two and three will obviously fill the gap between the two in a progressive way. The range of vocational training that the relief will support is quite wide. We hope that by April 1992 about 70 per cent. of the relevant qualifications will be in place and that the accreditation task up to level four will be substantially complete by the end of 1992.

Level five will in due course cover the very highest levels of vocational training. They will extend to senior managerial skills and to professional and degree level qualifications. We carefully considered including the new level five within training relief, but decided not to do so for a number of reasons.

First, there is little criticism of our performance in vocational training at that level. British professional skills are internationally recognised as being of the highest quality. Secondly—and I say this with some diffidence in view of the personal experiences of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith)—those who embark on training at that level can readily reap the personal financial reward for their investment in human capital. Therefore, they have less of a claim on the support of

[Mr. Maude]

taxpayers. However, that may not apply to those who abandon their professional calling to enter the more doubtfully rewarding profession of politics.

The third, purely practical, reason is that there are no level five qualifications currently in existence. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications and Scotvec are still discussing with professional and other bodies how best such qualifications might best be brought into the scheme. By restricting relief to levels one to four, we are concentrating resources on practical and supervisory skills, which is where the main criticisms of our current performance are directed, and where help and encouragement are needed.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am grateful for the Financial Secretary's assurance that tax relief given at the lower level of training will endure if a student advances to a higher level, and for the hon. Gentleman's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman).

On the more vexed question of exclusions at the highest level, in the light of the Financial Secretary's explanation, I believe that the Bill should proceed as drafted. If it is found that the hon. Gentleman's explanation has not stood the test of time, we can return to the issue in a future Finance Bill. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 31 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21

MARRIED COUPLE'S ALLOWANCE

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 15, line 40, at end insert—

'(3) Subsection (2) of section 257B of that Act shall cease to have effect after the year 1990-91; subsection (1) shall have effect for 1991-92 and subsequent years as if it read

"(1) Where a man is entitled to relief under section 257A for any year of assessment, he may transfer to his wife the whole or any part of the relief to which he is so entitled; and where such a transfer is effected, he shall cease to be entitled to a deduction from his total income for that year of the amount transferred and his wife shall be entitled to a deduction from her total income for that year of that amount";

and subsection (3) shall have effect for 1991-92 and subsequent years as if after "relates", there were added

"(aa) shall specify the amount of relief which is to be transferred to his wife.".'.

Clause 21 freezes the married couple's allowance at the current level of £1,720 per year for the financial year 1991-92. Only last June, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is now Prime Minister and who I suspect exerted some influence over the contents of the Bill before us, said in a speech to Welsh Conservatives that Labour's proposals in relation to the allowance were especially malign, and reserved for special attack and venom any proposal to freeze it.

Ten months later, the self-same Government, now led by the self-same person, are proposing precisely to freeze the married couple's allowance. It therefore comes as something of a surprise to my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself to find that a Government who were excoriating such a proposal only a few months ago are now including it in the Finance Bill.

The married couple's allowance should really be called the married man's allowance in another guise. Under section 257(1)(a) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, which was brought in as part of the Finance Bill 1988, the allowance initially goes to the husband and can only be transferred to his spouse with his consent. Even then, only that part of the allowance that the husband himself cannot use may be transferred—only that portion that he cannot set against his own taxable income. The transfer of the allowance from the husband to the wife can be done only in very limited circumstances, where the husband's taxable income is not sufficient for him to be able to make use of the allowance in its entirety.

7.45 pm

That makes a mockery of any pretence that there is independent taxation of husbands and wives. It makes a mockery also of the allowance's description as a married couple's allowance. It is directed primarily—and for the majority of taxpayers, entirely—at the husband and not at the couple. That can lead to discrimination against the wife in cases where there is no specific agreement between the couple as to who might make best use of the allowance.

The allowance may also discriminate against a couple where different rates of marginal tax are paid by the husband and the wife. If the wife is paying at a higher rate than the husband, yet it is only he who can offset the married couple's allowance against income, the couple will lose, whereas they would not if the wife could offset at least part of the allowance against her income.

The current operation of the married couple's allowance is not good for equity, fairness, or the dignity of wives in the taxation system. Independent taxation is a mirage. For three years in succession, we have sought to press on the Government a change in the way in which that allowance is applied.

Mr. Tim Smith: How can the hon. Gentleman assert that independent taxation is a mirage when, for the first time, married women are being sent tax returns?

Mr. Smith: That may be so, but most married women still cannot make any use of the married couple's allowance, which makes nonsense of any claim of truly independent taxation.

We acknowledge that an amendment that sought to put into effect the full import of our proposals would not be in order. In an ideal world, we would like to see the married couple offered a choice of how they apportioned their allowance. If they wanted to apportion it entirely in the name of the husband, or in that of the wife, or if they preferred to split it in any way between them, they would be able to choose to do so.

Failing agreement between the two parties about the proportion that should go to each, we should like an automatic equal apportionment between them. That would be a sensible approach, which would preserve the principles of independence and would benefit a small number of people who are disadvantaged by the way in which the present system operates.

However, within the terms of the Bill we cannot frame an amendment to put that into operation, because it would increase the tax liability of a limited number of men, and it would therefore be out of order within the terms of this

Committee. Therefore, we have drafted what I would describe as a second-best proposal, which forms the content of amendment No. 18.

The amendment goes some way to redress the problem of the present married couple's allowance and would allow it to be freely transferable, with the husband's agreement, whether he could have used it or not. That is the key change as, at present, it is freely transferable from husband to wife only with the husband's consent and if he is unable to make use of it. We are lifting that restriction. Under this amendment, if the husband wished—whether or not he were able to use the allowance—it would be possible for him to transfer it to his wife. That is fairer than the present position, and that is why we have tabled the amendment.

Having explained why we tabled the amendment, two further matters arise in connection with this amendment and this clause which ought to be named. First, when the Chancellor announced in the Budget that he was going to freeze the married couple's allowance for this year, he said that he would use the money to extend other forms of support to families and children.

"more should be done to help families with children. I propose to use the resources released by not increasing the married couple's allowance for that purpose."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 179.]

Note carefully the words:

"use the resources released by not increasing the married couple's allowance."

That brings £360 million in revenue to the Exchequer in 1991-92. In 1992-93, it will bring in £490 million.

In return, the Chancellor made some modest increases in child benefit, but they amounted to a cost of £220 million only to the Exchequer, which leaves a substantial surplus of revenues from the freezing of the married couple's allowance.

As far as I can tell, those substantial extra revenues have fallen into a black hole, and have not been used for child or family support. The Chancellor should have used the entirety of the money that the Exchequer raised by freezing the married couple's allowance to support families with children in other ways. We have long held the view that support for child benefit is by far the most effective means of targeting help to families with children.

It is sad that the Chancellor did not live up to his statement in the Budget and use the entirety of the revenue open to the Exchequer as a result of that change to help families with children. He should have done so, he said he was going to do so, but he did not. That is a failure on his part. Later, it would be useful to hear from the Minister of State what will be done with the extra money which falls to the Exchequer as a result of this clause.

I mentioned child benefit, and it is important to view the measures in this clause and the proposal contained in our amendment against the background of what is happening to that benefit. It is a tax-free cash benefit, paid per child, per week, directly to the person responsible for the child or children—usually directly to the mother. It was introduced in 1977, replacing child tax allowance and family allowance. Child benefit is universal, and is paid regardless of income or capital.

In Britain, 6·7 million families receive child benefit for 12 million children, at an annual cost to the Exchequer of £4·6 billion. The take-up rate is 98 per cent. Quite clearly, it is the best way to assist families on low incomes with children.

Child benefit was frozen at £7·25 per week in September 1987 by the then Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), until April 1991, when the Government granted a £1 per week increase to the first child, taking the benefit for them to £8·25 per week. The rate for subsequent children remains frozen at £7·25 until October of this year.

In his Budget statement in March 1991, the Chancellor announced that the rate for the first child would increase by another £1 to £9·25 in October. The rate for subsequent children would increase by a miserable 25p per child.

In his Budget statement, the Chancellor also promised to start uprating child benefit in line with inflation from April 1992. However, child benefit is still below what it should have been if it had been uprated in line with price increases since April 1987, when it was frozen. If that had been the case, the value of child benefit for each and every child would now be £9·55 per child per week. Even for the first child, the value is short of that amount from October this year, and the value for subsequent children is substantially short of the amount that it should have been.

One of the immediate acts of a Labour Government will be to fulfil our pledge to uprate child benefit in full to the value to which it ought to have been uprated to account for the rise in prices since 1987. That would be a more substantial way to assist families with children than anything that the Government have done in recent months or years, even after considering the repentance in the Budget and in the Chancellor's statement.

The Government are accruing extra income to the Exchequer by the change that they are making in clause 21. They are not devoting the entirety of that income to the purpose for which it was supposed to be used. They are using only a portion of it to increase child benefit, and they could have used more.

In tabling the amendment, we are doing two things. First, we are drawing attention to the inadequacies of the present arrangement for the use of the married couple's allowance, and to the unfairness of that arrangement; we are seeking to make it fairer, and to offer couples at least some choice in how the allowance is apportioned. Secondly, we are drawing attention to the fact that the Government should be offering families with children much more support. In freezing child benefit and then neglecting to uprate it properly, the Government have failed Britain's families. Opposition Members will continue to remind them of that during the coming weeks and months.

8 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I shall be brief, because I know that the Minister of State wishes to speak. Let me put it on record, however, that my party shares the objectives of Labour's amendment—and shares even more emphatically those of the amendment that Labour Members would have tabled had that been in order. Indeed, we tabled such an amendment; and it is intriguing to note that an amendment along the same lines was debated last year, but somehow slipped through the net. The objective that we share is, of course, to make independent taxation genuinely independent.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I know that the hon. Gentleman has strong views about whether amendments are in order. Given what he said to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) in yesterday's debate, I hope that he will make fulsome apologies for having enabled an

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

amendment that was out of order to be deemed in order last year. The strictures that he applied to the Opposition were, after all, very severe.

Mr. Beith: I shall do nothing of the sort. It was Labour's amendment that was found to be in order last year, and it is the Labour amendment that has turned out to be out of order this year. I shall not stray too far from the subject of our present debate; let me point out, however, that my criticism last night related not to whether the amendment was technically in order, but to the confusion that was apparent in the setting out of its objectives. It also related to the failure of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)—the spokesman for the official Opposition—to explain how her party could achieve two objectives at once without adding up the cost of both.

Happily, that does not apply to amendment No. 18. We agree—I hope—that we want to secure genuinely independent taxation that will not depend on the husband's choosing to transfer allowance that he does not require, but will allow each partner to obtain the maximum benefit from his or her share. The current procedures do not allow that. As the arguments advanced in support of them have been largely technical, I should like to think that the Government really wish to achieve the objective of the amendment, and that they will continue to try to do so. Indeed, I rather hope that the Minister of State—who, I am sure, takes a personal interest in the matter—will tell us that the Government are still trying to achieve that aim of genuinely independent taxation and genuinely divisible married couple's allowance.

I am glad that you called me before you called the Minister of State, Mr. McWilliam, because I want to underline the question put by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith): what is the future of the married couple's allowance? Do the Government intend to phase it out and let it wither on the vine by not increasing it in line with inflation year by year; or is that simply a short-term treatment?

The failure to index the allowance has released considerable sums, more of which could have been devoted to child benefit. Is it the Government's policy to use more and more of the savings obtained from not indexing the married couple's allowance to fund child benefit improvements? If it is, we can support them in that objective, but so far the position is unclear. The Minister would do us a service if she set out the Government's policy on both the future of the married couple's allowance and the extent to which the savings to the Exchequer will be devoted to child benefit. She should also continue to try to find a mechanism to achieve the objective of the amendment.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I wish to make a small but, I hope, important point about child benefit and about whether people will actually receive the proposed increase.

On Second Reading, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said:

"perception is lagging behind reality".—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1991; Vol. 190, c. 179.]

I sometimes feel like turning that phrase the other way round, and suggesting that reality—in terms of tax and benefits—often lags behind public perceptions.

Many people believe, deep down, that they will receive £140 off their next poll tax bill when it arrives some time in June, as a result of the proposed changes. In fact, we know that that applies to only 40 per cent. of people; but that did not prevent Conservative candidates in the local elections from putting out leaflets suggesting that every person in the country would receive a cheque for that amount, as if it would be signed by the Secretary of State for the Environment himself.

That is manifestly not the truth; and exactly the same is happening in regard to child benefit. When we consider one benefit, we must also consider its interaction with others. The increase in child benefit has been sold as a great bonus; the brakes are off and, we are told, every family will gain. Will the Minister confirm, however, that the effect of that increase will be rubbed out by the impact of the Government's freezing of single-parent benefit? Lone parents must be among the poorest groups in our society, especially when they have no opportunity to work —or, if they have, can work only in part-time and, usually, low-paid work. Some must stay at home with their children. When the freezing of the single-parent benefit is put together with the increase in child benefit, the result will be that such people will not receive the extra money that the Government are promising.

This is another classic case of the Government's giving out what they nowadays call a "headline" figure—that usually means a figure that they hope will make the headlines in a newspaper or on television—which does not represent money in people's pockets. What has been given with one hand has, effectively, been taken away with the other.

If the Government had done the decent thing, they would have uprated child benefit properly. Then we would not have had to witness the farce of the Government's playing with the language in the last Conservative manifesto, in which we were told that the benefit would be uprated "as now". That meant that it would remain "as now" on the day of the last general election. No uprating took place until the public put pressure on the Government to take the brakes off and begin to uprate the benefit in line with inflation—and they are not there yet.

I hope that, next time, the Government's promises will be listened to carefully. What has happened to child benefit is, in my view, an illustration of what the Government do. They make a promise and wrap it up in language, and people think that they will receive the money; but, when they work out the details, they find that they have been short-changed.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I appreciate the aims of the amendment—and those of the "non-amendment", if I may use EC parlance. I must admit that I have some sympathy with those aims. The amendment is similar in some respects to one that was considered in Committee last year. My right hon. Friend the present Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed his sympathy with what that amendment sought to achieve, but felt unable to accept it and others because, in his view, the benefit would not be commensurate with the cost. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has given some idea of what his amendment aims to achieve and of the complications that might ensue.

There were three reasons for my right hon. Friend's decision last year. I think that it is worth repeating them, because they apply, to a greater or lesser extent, to any

proposal to make the present arrangements more flexible. My right hon. Friend said that the present straightforward system might be made more complex. He did not want many more people to have to fill in tax returns, and to have to deal with the Inland Revenue, which would place increased burdens on both sides. He also felt that there should be no reduction in the privacy that husbands and wives enjoy under the present system

The amendment that we are discussing raises similar concerns. The concerns might not matter and the cost might be worthwhile if many people were better off as a result. But the amendment would not have that effect because it would enable fewer than 50,000 people, or about 1 per cent. of the total, to arrange their tax affairs in such a way as to reduce the wife's higher rate tax liability. No other couples would be better off in cash terms as a result of the new transfer option offered by the amendment.

It is possible for a husband and wife to run their financial affairs separately now. That is why we were the first Government to treat a married woman as a fully independent taxpayer under the new system of independent taxation. I realise that, although a couple might not benefit financially from being able to split the married couple's allowance, they might consider it the right thing to do as a matter of principle. That point was made in the amendment and by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

In considering the present amendment we have to look at the principle—which I agree is important—and the practicalities. I believe that the considerations are outweighed by the practical disadvantages of the proposed amendment. The main advantage of the present system is that it ensures that the married couple's allowance is given initially to the partner who is most likely to be able to use it effectively—the husband. That minimises the need for transfer, so it is a cost-efficient way of giving relief to married couples. Of course that is not popular with everyone. Some people do not like it because they would gain more by a different set of rules and others do not approve of it as a matter of principle.

I assure the Committee that the Government have considered carefully on several occasions various options for making the rules more flexible for transferring the allowance. However, we have always come up against the fact that the benefits to be gained from a change are not sufficient to justify the upheaval.

Last year my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer explained some of the disadvantages of that option. I shall briefly repeat his explanation. Eighty per cent. of taxpayers are dealt with through pay-as-you-earn. The amendment would entail moving away from a system whereby 80 per cent. of these taxpayers do not make tax returns and do not deal with the Inland Revenue but are covered by PAYE. From a practical point of view the amendment could be regarded as a retrograde step. If the amendment were accepted, married couples would have to be informed about the new options and given the opportunity to choose them. The Inland Revenue would have to ensure that the husband's and wife's tax offices, which deal with each other only occasionally under independent taxation, made the necessary adjustments to their records. Procedures would have to be set up to deal with couples who wanted to change their decision later because during the year their income turned out to be more or less than they had expected. That would carry a cost in extra staff and extra worry about the options for millions of married couples whose tax affairs are now straightforward.

Although the amendment is not exactly the same as those that were tabled last year, the intention is the same, and I must reach the same conclusion as my right hon. Friend did last year. I certainly admit quite freely that the present system is not perfect, but in practical terms it is the best possible solution.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury raised some specific matters including the apparent discrepancy of £140 million between the yield from freezing the married couples' allowance and what is being spent on the increase in child benefit from October this year.

I know that the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) will understand that the social security system is a great ship of the state and it takes time to get new systems into place and that 7 October is the earliest date on which the additional increases in child benefit can be paid. There is generally a six-month lead time before social security changes can be implemented and from that day all families with children will receive a further £1 a week for the first eligible child and 25p a week for subsequent children. To that extent, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is correct that there is a discrepancy of £140 million, but I ask him to regard the Budget as a total package. Of course the £140 million is within all the measures included in this year's Budget. Next year, however, the cost of introducing the increases in child benefit will be accounted for by freezing the married couples' allowance. I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that, here again, there was a practical difficulty.

8.15 pm

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed asked about the Government's future intentions for the married couple's allowance. He asked whether the freeze was the first step towards its abolition. He reads far too much into a decision that was taken in an economic situation which called for a tight Budget this year to direct scarce resources towards families with children. It reflects the Chancellor's priorities this year. As the hon. Gentleman knows, all the allowances are reviewed each year in the run up to the Budget and considered in the light of the economic circumstance then prevailing.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West asked about the freeze on one-parent benefit. Lone parents already have the £1 increase in child benefit for the first child. One-parent benefit has been frozen, but that freeze is fully offset in income support. The level of one-parent benefit is subject to review by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security each year. The hon. Gentleman will understand that, although it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, important improvements for lone parents are on the way in the child support Bill which will come to the House next month.

The hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Leeds, West asked about the freezing of child benefit in the past. I remind them and the Committee that the resources from the freezing of child benefit were used for other social security priorities. Annual spending on poorer families has increased by £500 million since 1988

and the resources released by the freezing of child benefit during that period were in part directed to helping poorer pensioners.

Mr. Battle: Is it not true that the increase in money to the poorest was used in housing benefit as their rent went up, so in effect it was a subsidy to the housing system?

Mrs. Shephard: No, I do not agree with that. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that there were enhanced arrangements for people on income support and family credit which accounted in part for the £500 million. I remind him that the overall spending on families with children is higher now than it would have been had child benefit been regularly uprated since 1988. As we have been talking about the prosperity of families, I remind the Committee that the take-home pay of families on half the average wage has gone up by 29 per cent. under the present Government compared with 4·2 per cent. under Labour and that of the average family with two children has gone up by nearly 37 per cent. compared with a measly 0·6 per cent. under Labour. I think that families know where their best interests lie.

Mr. Chris Smith: I should begin by welcoming the Minister of State to our proceedings on the Finance Bill as the clause that we are discussing is her first segment of the Bill. I also welcome some of her remarks. She said that she had some sympathy with the aims of our amendment, that she regarded the principle enshrined in it as important and that only practicalities outweighed it in her mind. In another part of her speech, she said, quite correctly, that the present married couples' allowance system is not perfect.

I welcome all those statements. It is a pity that, although the Government support the principle of making the married couples' allowance a joint decision between husband and wife rather than an automatic accretion to the husband's tax relief, they do not carry their sympathy into legislation.

The Minister of State said that the cost next year of the commitment to child benefit would use up more of the amount raised by freezing the married couple's allowance, I do not think that it would use up all of it. If I am incorrect, I shall happily give way to the Minister. The figures in the Red Book do not seem to indicate that, even then, it would use up all of it.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is a minor difference between the two figures. I say "minor" within the context of the Government's whole public expenditure budget, which is enormous—amounting to some £50 million. Given that we are talking about next year, and given the difficulty of predicting the number of children who will qualify for child benefit, the discrepancy should be regarded as just that. It may be ironed out by the birth rate next year.

Mr. Smith: I am glad that the Minister of State confirms that there will be a shortfall in the use of the money for child benefit next year. Although £50 million may be a minor amount in terms of the overall public budget, I should prefer it if £50 million had been used to support children through child benefit rather than simply being swallowed up by the Exchequer.

The Minister of State also argued that our amendment, which would allow the husband to transfer the married couples' allowance to the wife if he so wished, would benefit financially only 1 per cent. of tax-paying couples. I accept that only a small number of people would benefit financially from such an arrangement, but the point of the amendment is that not only financial benefit but the principle of choice is at stake. A couple should jointly determine what happens rather than having the Exchequer determine by fiat that the whole amount will go to the husband. The amendment is not just about financial gain but is about equity of treatment between husband and wife within the taxation system.

We believe that the principles that we have adumbrated in relation to the amendment and the clause still stand. The Government's praying in aid of practical difficulties has not stopped them dreaming up systems of local government finance and all sorts of other mechanisms to penalise people. Praying in aid practicalities in defence of doing nothing on a basic principle that is right does not wash. However, because of the Bill's strictures, we could not put forward in its entirety the proposal that we should have liked to make on the married couples' allowance. Our amendment is therefore very much second best, and although it would be a small step in the right direction, it would not be right to push it to a vote. However, I hope that we can return to the matter on a future occasion. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 21 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14

BAD DEBTS

Mr. Chris Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 19, in page 11, line 18, after 'one year' insert

'and after "elapsed" there shall be added ", or the company or individual liable to pay any outstanding amount of the consideration has become insolvent and (except where paragraph 10(1A)(B) below applies) the person has submitted a claim in the insolvency for the oustanding amount of the consideration.

(1A) a company becomes insolvent for the purposes of this section if:

(a) it goes into liquidation in the United Kingdom or the Isle of Man at a time when its assets are insufficient for the payment of its debts and other liabilities and the expenses of the winding up;

(b) a person who has been appointed in Great Britain to act as the Administrator or Administrative Receiver issues a certificate of his opinion that, if it went into liquidation, the assets of the company would be insufficient to cover the payment of any dividend in respect of debts which are neither secured nor preferential; or

(c) a composition or scheme proposed by the Directors is approved under Part I of the Insolvency Act 1986.

(1B) An individual becomes insolvent for the purposes of this section if:

(a) in England and Wales he is adjudged bankrupt, a deed of arrangement is made for the benefit of his creditors, a composition or scheme proposed by him is approved under Part VIII of the Insolvency Act 1986 or, after his death, his estate falls to be administered in accordance with an order under Part XV of the Act;

(b) in Scotland, sequestration of his estate is awarded, he signs a trust deed for his creditors or, after his death, a judicial factor is appointed under section 11A of the Judicial Factors (Scotland) Act 1989 to administer his estate;

(c) in Northern Ireland he is adjudged bankrupt, a deed of arrangement is made for the benefit of his creditors, a resolution of his creditors is approved by the court under section 5 of the Bankruptcy

Amendment Act (Northern Ireland) 1929 or, after his death, the court makes an order for the administration in bankruptcy of his estate; or

(d) in the Isle of Man, he is adjudged bankrupt, a deed of arrangement is made for the benefit of his creditors or, after his death, the court makes an order for the administration in bankruptcy of his estate,".".

Clause 14 relates to the recovery of bad debts on which value added tax has been paid to Customs and Excise. It reduces the waiting period for recovering such VAT from two years to one year. The issue is important because it affects substantially many businesses, especially smaller businesses. However, many traders in the smallest category of businesses, with a turnover of under £300,000, use the cash accounting mechanism for paying VAT, which becomes payable to Customs and Excise only when it is received by the trader rather than when the invoices are issued. The cash accounting system gets round the problem of bad debts altogether. The companies that use that system are unaffected by the clause.

However, other traders must pay the VAT to Customs and Excise as they issue invoices to their customers. If they never receive the VAT from the customer, they can eventually reclaim it from Customs. Until 1990, they could reclaim it only if the customer could be proved to be insolvent. As a result of the change introduced in the Finance Act 1990, they were allowed to reclaim it if they had written off the debt in their own books and if the debt was over two years old and had not been paid. That helped some traders but disadvantaged others, for example, if the customer who owed the VAT went rapidly into liquidation but the trader then had to wait for two years before he could recover the uncollected VAT.

In our debates on last year's Finance Bill, we argued that the Government's proposal was unfair. We tabled amendments that sought to allow the old and new reliefs to run in parallel, so it would then be a case either of a period having elapsed without the debt being paid or of the company that owed the debt becoming insolvent and, as a result, the relief being triggered. We suggested that those measures could run side by side and that that would solve the problem. As an alternative, we proposed that the two-year period should be reduced to one year, thus relieving hard-pressed traders and reducing the number of cases where the old system would have given relief before the new system came into operation.

It is worth examining exactly what happened during the passage of last year's Finance Bill, because the Government's behaviour on the specific issue of bad debts was instructive. When we debated the measure in Committee on the Floor of the House, the Government clearly said that they believed that there was some merit in our argument for a shorter time period than the two-year one. The then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who has subsequently risen in the ranks to become the Government Chief Whip, said:

"Our judgment was that two years is an appropriate period of time to elapse before a company decides that a debt cannot be recovered."

8.30 pm

The then Economic Secretary said that he was aware of the arguments that we and others, including some of his hon. Friends, had been mounting. He continued:

"I have concluded that there may be scope for further improvement to the scheme. We shall be examining that possibility between now and Report stage."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1990; Vol. 172, c. 812.]

That welcome sign of movement on the Government's part came about last May. But in July last year, when we debated the Bill on Report, there was no sign in the amendments of any extra relief on the bad debt issue. Our proposal for a reduction in the time period from two years to one year was nowhere to be seen. Having given a sign that they were likely to see fit to bring forward some further improvement to the Bill in May, the Government reneged on that commitment when we discussed the Bill on Report in July.

The then Economic Secretary also spoke in the debate on Report. He said that he did not believe that it was right to go for a shorter period and stated:

"In the past two months, we have given careful consideration to whether we could justify a further change, but we have come to the conclusion that we could not."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1990; Vol. 176, c. 797.]

Having reached that conclusion on 16 July last year, the Government came forward in this year's Budget and Finance Bill debate to say that they were wrong all along. They have, in effect, accepted the arguments that we mounted in Committee and on Report during the passage of last year's Finance Bill and have introduced precisely the proposal that we made in Committee to reduce the qualifying period for relief from two years to one—that is welcome.

Our amendment seeks to draw the Government just a little bit further along the road to provide relief to hard-pressed traders. The U-turn that they have made on the issue of the time period—agreeing to reduce it from two years to one year—should be accompanied by the additional provision that, if a company becomes insolvent within that one-year period, the VAT bad debt relief should be immediately claimable, rather than the claimant having to wait the full year.

We believe that that proposal is important for two reasons. First, the rate of company insolvencies and liquidations is currently running at a record level. Some 24,442 firms failed in 1990 in Britain and, in the first quarter of this year, the numbers were up by almost 70 per cent. on the equivalent period for last year. Peat, Marwick, McLintock has estimated that there will be five times as many receiverships in 1991 as there were in 1988. Therefore, the problem of firms going bust and, as a result, being unable to meet their VAT debts to other traders is bound to increase. While the provision of a reduction to one year in the time period is welcome, the introduction of an alternative, parallel system of being able to claim the relief when an insolvency occurs would bring extra relief.

The second principal reason for the amendment is that cash flow problems often catch out companies, especially small ones, and force them to close earlier than was, perhaps, economically necessary. We propose the amendment in order to assist the cash flow position of traders who have already paid VAT to Customs and Excise but have not received it from the person to whom they sold the goods or services. If the company owing VAT goes into liquidation three, four or five months after the VAT was paid to Customs and Excise, there will be a further seven, eight or nine months to wait before the VAT can be reclaimed—that makes a seven to nine months delay in the cash flow represented by that VAT payment.

Our proposal would directly assist the cash flow problems of such companies by enabling them to claim the VAT relief immediately upon the liquidation of the person or company owing the money. Therefore, we believe that

our measure will enable the Government to go further than they have. We welcome the fact that they have now seen the light and accepted this year what we were urging on them last year. However, we wish that they could go a little further and ensure that the "payable on liquidation" system that was in place could run in parallel with their new provision to improve the system further and assist businesses, especially smaller ones, even more than the new clause does.

Mr. Beith: This useful amendment addresses the particular problem of insolvency. We all welcomed the introduction of the VAT bad debts provision and sought to extend it last year. We have all welcomed the shortening of the period to one year, as announced in the Budget statement. All that is the tip of the iceberg of the bad debt problems affecting small businesses. We believe that many more steps should be taken, including the sort of measures for interest provisions for bad debts supported by some of the Government's own Back Benchers. Bad debts cause severe problems for small business men and women and, with the VAT man on their back as well, they should be afforded any possible relief from bad debt problems that they ought not to be bearing. Therefore, the Government's decision to shorten the time period is most welcome.

I am glad that the amendment addresses the insolvency problem and I hope that the Minister will be reasonably sympathetic towards it. I hope that she will also realise that, within the purview of her Department, there are other issues affecting small businesses to address. The Government should recognise responsibility for those problems relating to debt, as they presided over the recessionary climate in which those debts arose. I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic to that problem.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has given us some background to clause 14 and the amendment. He said, as did the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), that in 1988 there was a comprehensive review of the arrangements for the relief of VAT on bad debts. During that review, the views of professional and business organisations were sought. The review recommended a change from the old, restrictive system, dependent only on the formal insolvency of the debtor, to a new, comprehensive scheme, providing relief on all bad debts, subject to elapsed time and write-off in the trader's accounts.

When last year's Finance Bill was debated in the Committee of the whole House and the House, one of the main concerns expressed centred on the effect of the two-year waiting period. During the year there have been representations from professional and business organisations, as well as individuals, to the effect that the waiting period is too long and that, at a time of recession, the cash flow problems thus caused are onerous. I began to wonder whether the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury too would be begrudging, but he welcomed the reduction of the waiting period to one year. It was precisely because of the concerns that had been expressed during the year that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the provision to reduce the period. That reduction should help to meet the concern and the criticisms that have been expressed.

Mr. Chris Smith: I hope that, in the point that I am about to make, I shall not appear grudging. During the passage of last year's Finance Act, people involved in business and industry up and down the country, as well as Members of Parliament, made innumerable representations about the two-year period that the Government then proposed. The Government considered the matter carefully for two months. Why, after their careful consideration, did they fail to accept that one year would be better, whereas this year they have felt able to accept the case that we made then? Why have they changed their minds?

Mrs. Shephard: I thought I had made it clear that the representations continued during the year. The Government and the customs authorities have listened, and have responded by introducing these changes.

The old, very restricted scheme allowed relief only on the formal insolvency of the debtor. At the centre of all argument for the extension of relief is the feeling of injustice on the part of a supplier who has to pay tax on a supply for which there is no prospect of payment. That is very well understood. Indeed, that theme was consistent throughout the consultative exercise before the 1988 bad debt review. Many trade associations criticised the inadequacy, the ponderous nature and the unfairness of the old arrangements. It is clear that, on grounds of equity, there are no strong arguments for defending the restrictiveness of the insolvency-based arrangements. The new, comprehensive scheme greatly widens the scope by providing relief on many more debts. It extends relief to the very many cases in which debtors, over a long period, refuse to pay or pay only token amounts, or simply vanish. The new scheme removes a legitimate and long-standing grievance, and, together with the halving of the waiting period now proposed, will provide an immediate boost —estimated at £340 million in 1991-92—to the cash flow of business.

At the time of the 1988 review, detailed consideration was given to a dual scheme of bad debt relief, and the concept was rejected. Let me outline the main reasons. First, there was the problem of accounting arrangements. There would be a need for voluminous regulations and instructions to cover all contingencies, and an attempt to minimise the dangers of double claiming would be both burdensome and intrusive to business. Let me give an example. The two schemes do not match in every respect. They do not match in clawback. There is no clawback under the formal insolvency scheme, but there is under the new scheme. If that were left unaltered, it would advantage one type of debtor over another. If clawback were extended to the existing insolvency scheme, it would lead to quite a nightmare changeover, in which claims to liquidators under the new scheme would be tax-inclusive, whereas those under the old scheme would be tax-exclusive.

I know that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is aware that the introduction of regulations—after the contribution of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) I hardly dare utter that word—to cope with this kind of problem would be difficult. The existence of a dual scheme, governed by complex regulations, would be wide open for double claiming—either accidental, by traders not unnaturally confused, or, more worryingly, deliberate, by unscrupulous traders. It would be all too easy to claim once, when the debtor became insolvent, and again when the elapsed time criterion had been met. There is also the question of controlling the system. Any VAT

system has to be both fair and convenient to operate, not only to business but to the Customs authorities. When one looks at the problems of controlling a dual scheme—complex to operate, and open to abuse—it becomes clear that the control problems would be formidable. We estimate that we should need 150 to 200 extra VAT control staff just to police a dual scheme. I am sure that most hon. Members agree that that would not be a very productive use of resources.

8.45 pm

Perhaps our overwhelming reason for not supporting the amendment is that our consultations with business and industry have revealed that the main support for a dual scheme resulted from the waiting time of two years. Indeed, at a recent meeting with the Customs authorities, the CBI said that it would not be interested in a dual scheme if the waiting period were one year. There were other representations to the same effect. The reduction to one year has gone a long way towards meeting the problems expressed by representatives of trade and industry.

The hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned current problems of companies and other businesses, including insolvency and cash flow. In that regard, I should remind the Committee that this year's Budget injected £750 million into business. Many of the Budget measures were designed to help cash flow—the reduction in corporation tax; the extension of the carry-back period for losses from one year to three years; the deregulatory measures; the 40 per cent. increase in VAT threshold; the possibility of quarterly PAYE and national insurance returns for small businesses to help 700,000 firms; and the extension of simplified accounts. The Budget, of which this clause is a part, went a very long way to help companies and other businesses with the problems that they currently face.

Mr. Chris Smith: I immediately acknowledge that the reduction from two years to one year goes a long way towards meeting the problems that people in business identified when the two-year period was introduced last year. That is precisely why we urged this course on the Government last year. Their repentance is a year late, but, none the less, welcome. The Minister dwelt on the benefits of the new system, but failed to recognise that it has disadvantages where liquidation occurs within a few months of the payment of VAT to Customs and Excise. That raises a very genuine problem. I agree that there may not now be as much pressure for a parallel scheme of this kind as there was last year, when the period was two years, but insolvencies that occur within a very short period of the payment of VAT present serious problems. I hope that the Government will consider whether such a parallel scheme could be implemented. We may even find another case of the repentance that we have seen this year. Of course, it will be a different Government of another party who will introduce next year's Bill.

The Minister referred to practical problems. She talked about the complexity of the clawback system and about the dangers of double claiming. We accept that there might be practical difficulties, but they would not be insurmountable. When something is worth doing, it is worth overcoming practical difficulties to do it. None the less, I hope that, in respect of this issue, we shall be able to proceed by means of consensus rather than confrontation.

It is a matter to which I hope the Government will pay continuing attention. If it becomes identified during our further deliberations on the Bill that business is unhappy without the parallel provision of an insolvency trigger for VAT bad debt relief, I hope that the Government will consider an amendment even at the 11th hour.

With that hope and with the wish to proceed by consensus if possible, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill (Clauses 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 31 and 77 and Schedule 14), reported, without amendment; to lie upon the Table.

CIVIL JURISDICTION AND JUDGMENTS BILL *[LORDS]*

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Motion made and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY (FINANCIAL PROVISIONS) BILL

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Motion made and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Roads (Western Isles)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

8.51 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Good communications are the key to economic progress. That is especially true the more remote and peripheral people are from the core, and therefore especially true in the Western isles. We need good communications both between us and the mainland, cut off as we are by the waters of the Minch, but also internally, between the various islands of the Hebridean chain.

The Western Isles council currently maintains a roads network of approximately 740 miles of adopted road, of which only 155 miles are of double track width. The remaining 585 miles are single-track and of extremely sub-standard foundation and alignment. That presents a huge problem for the development of good communications, and is therefore a major impediment to economic progress in the islands. I accept that it cannot all be tackled overnight or even over the next decade, and I want to make a plea this evening for a focused effort to tackle one crucial part of that road network, the main road running north and south through the Western Isles, which I shall refer to as the spinal route.

The spinal route runs from Ness in Lewis to Leverburgh in Harris; and then from Newton in North Uist to Ludag in South Uist, and from Eoligarry to Castlebay in Barra. Upgrading would ensure a good north-south road linking the island chain, serving the most populated areas in the Hebrides, including all five of the mainland ferry terminals. The strategic nature of the spinal route for future economic development and inter-island as well as mainland communication means that the benefits of upgrading will be widely spread and provide maximum value for money.

I do not propose to dwell on the inadequacies of the present road. The Minister is familiar with the islands from the days when his family used to own a sizeable chunk of them, and he and his brother were themselves familiar sights, tramping through the heather in their kilts. He knows full well the deplorable condition of the road network in the islands, particularly in the Uists, as do the officials from the Scottish Development Department who visited the islands last year to make a special report on this issue. To refresh his memory, however, I have provided him with some photos to peruse. What they depict are not isolated tracks in the most remote parts of the islands but sections of the main spinal route, the main economic thoroughfare of the Hebrides over which all trade and commerce have to pass.

Why is the road network so bad? Most roads in the Western isles have been developed from rough footpaths to cart tracks and then to vehicular carriageways by means of various layers of clay, stones and rocks being placed one on top of the other, with no attempt to remove the underlying layers of peat which, in places can be up to 3 m thick. That results in a road which floats on a peat foundation and which is therefore prone to excessive shrinkage, expansion and consequent deformation under even moderate traffic. In addition, climatic conditions contribute to extensive cracking and rutting.

I am assured by the engineering department of the Western Isles council that, if assessed on mainland criteria, over 50 per cent. of the island network would be classified as failed. In consequence, maintenance cycles have to be more regular on the islands than is the mainland norm. The problem, caused by inadequate peat foundations, is exacerbated by the roads being single-track, so large wheel loads in particular get concentrated in the same ruts.

That is the historial background to the problem. But over the past decade, the increasing tempo of trade by fish farming, agriculture under the programme of the Industrial Development Board and fishing has led to increased heavy lorry traffic on the roads. It is estimated also that the introduction of roll-on/roll-off ferries has led to a further 37 per cent. increase in heavy vehicles on island roads. Finally, thanks in large part to better promotion of the islands by Caledonian MacBrayne and by the tourist authorities, regular travelling tourist traffic and traffic from the ordinary travelling public has also increased enormously in the past decade.

There is no sign of a reduction in the trend. Indeed, if anything, it is expected to intensify with the construction of the Skye bridge with which the Minister will be familiar, and the hoped-for development of a vehicular ferry link across the sound of Harris. With a major multinational even now applying for planning permission to excavate an estimated 10 million tons of material annually from a new super quarry at Lingerbay, the heavy traffic pressure on the fragile and inadequate road network will continue unabated.

The local authority is working hard to upgrade the spinal route. One must remember that the first problem facing the local authority after local government reorganisation in the early 1970s was to establish vehicular links to all the permanently inhabited islands in the Hebrides. With the completion of the Vatersay causeway, that ambition has been realised. Since 1983, the Western Isles council has been devoting the bulk of its transport capital consent to upgrading the islands' single track roads. But such is the poor nature of those roads and the high cost of bringing material on to the isles that to upgrade a mile of road costs approximately £500,000. At the present rate of progress, therefore, with the existing capital consent, it will take until the year 2025 just to upgrade the main spinal route.

When he has studied the figures, and the case made by the islands council, I am sure that the Minister will agree this is simply unacceptable. It is a disgrace that a region of Scotland, considered sufficiently distinct and self-contained to merit its own separate local government, should look like entering the 21st century with its main north-south commercial road still single track in large parts. Surely it is a modest enough ambition for the spinal route to be fully double-tracked by the year 2000. My constituents do not ask for dual carriageways, they do not ask for motorways, they do not even ask to be latched on to the official trunk road network in Scotland. All they ask for is an end to the age of the passing place on the main public thoroughfare connecting all the outer islands.

There are those, of course, who still have the temerity to argue that we ask for too much and who like to point out that expenditure per head is higher in the islands than the Scottish average. But, of course, that is necessarily so, because there are more miles of road per capita in the islands than the Scottish average. In any case, per capita comparisons are entirely the wrong way to look at the matter.

Roads are one of the basic services provided by Government. In this, they are like education, health and social security. It would be unacceptable to argue that people living in the Scottish islands should expect significantly lower quality schooling, much poorer medical care or less social security provision than people elsewhere in Scotland. The Government rightly accept that they have a duty to provide a similar quality of provision across Scotland in all these areas. So it should be with roads and communications, a responsibility of Government so basic that even Adam Smith acknowledged it.

I therefore urge the Government to look hard at the case which the Western Isles council will be making this summer in its transport policy programme for 1991-95 and to adopt it as their target that the main spinal route through the Western Isles be upgraded to basic double-track standard by the year 2000—that is by the end of this century. That target is realistic, achievable, eminently reasonable and long overdue. I commend it to the Minister.

9.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has raised the subject of roads in his constituency. I have a great affection for the whole of Scotland, but especially for the Western Isles. Their outstanding beauty is so striking that it reminds me of the words of the Canadian Boating song:

"From the lone schieling of the misty Island
Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas,
Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides."

For my part, as a Scots lowlander, I have many extremely happy memories of the Western Isles, which have some of the most magnificent scenery in the world, a scenery which more and more tourists are in the process of discovering. Indeed, many more tourists will go there once the Skye bridge is built in the years to come. All that will have implications for the employment prospects and for the way of life of the islanders.

I have listened carefully to everything that the hon. Gentleman said, and I congratulate him on the way in which he put his arguments. I realise that people in the Western Isles are concerned with the down-to-earth practicalities of life, so I am glad to say that I essentially agree with the case that the hon. Gentleman advanced on behalf of his constituency. I am sympathetic to his cause, which is to put an end to passing places, as I was to the building of the Vatersay causeway. We shall study the photographs that he has provided, the points that he has made and, of course, the transport policy programme of the Western Islands council as soon as it has been submitted.

Let me start by summarising the position on resources. With the exception of small amounts of capital expenditure which some authorities are able to finance from current revenue, capital expenditure which local authorities spend on roadworks must be covered by capital consents issued by the Secretary of State under section 94 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. Of the £160 million capital consents issued under section 94 to Scottish regional and islands councils for expenditure on roads and transport in 1991-92, £5 million was allocated to the Western Islands council. Several points are worth emphasising about that £5 million figure.

First, on an expenditure per head of population basis, the Western Isles figure, £161, is more than five times higher than the average figure for Scotland as a whole, which is £31. Secondly, on the perhaps more appropriate comparison basis for a thinly populated rural area, the Western Isles allocation per kilometre of local road length, at £4,226, is also substantially higher than the Scotland figure of £3,311. Thirdly, the Western Isles' £5 million final allocation for 1991-92 was increased from the previous provisional figure of £4·8 million. That increase was made at a time when the resources available for capital allocations generally were severely limited. We were able to increase the allocation this year in this way, although four of the nine regions, and both the other islands councils, received no such increase. That is evidence of our concern about the position in the Western Isles and of our commitment to ensuring that resources are channelled where they are most needed.

The statistics that I have just quoted show objectively that we accept many of the points that the hon. Gentleman has made, and demonstrate our commitment to take action to overcome the particular problems in the islands. But the Scottish Office's practical concern has also been shown by the strenuous efforts that officials in the Scottish Office Environment Department have taken to apprise themselves of the particular conditions which apply in the Western Isles and the work which the Western Isles islands council is doing to meet the most pressing needs.

Last August, the Scottish Office's director of roads visited the islands, as the guest of the islands council, to inspect the authority's road network at first hand. This followed on a tour of inspection the previous year by a senior member of the roads directorate staff. In October 1990, the head of the Scottish Office's transport and local roads divisions also visited the islands, again on a visit kindly arranged by the islands council. I must at this point express my warmest thanks to the council, first for making the three visits possible, and secondly for ensuring that all the officials concerned were able, during intensive programmes, to see the full range of the problems facing the authority and the work done to overcome them. I know that these senior officials were able to penetrate parts of the road network which they normally would be unlikely to reach. I should also like to thank Convener Donald Macaulay for his personal welcome to me last summer, which was greatly appreciated.

I agree with the hon. Member for Western Isles that the Western Isles council faces particular difficulty in maintaining its roads. The main concerns are the proportion of single-track roads in the network, the high proportion of roads which are founded on peat, and the damage being caused to those roads as a result of the significantly increased volume of heavy goods vehicle traffic, and the weight of the vehicles using the roads.

From this point of view, the considerable improvement over the past 10 years in the ferry services provided by Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd. from the mainland to the Outer Isles has been a mixed blessing. Substantial levels of investment in new linkspans and new larger vessels to provide roll-on/roll-off ferries has brought about a significant change in the traffic levels and weights using roads which, anywhere else in Scotland, would not be looked on as acceptable.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

On all occasions when Scottish Office officials have visited the islands, they have been very impressed by the programme of maintenance and improvement planned and being carried out by the islands council engineering team. We recognise that a substantial part of the council's road system runs beside the coast or through inland lochs with long causeways. Those sections of road are prone to damage in the storm conditions which are common in the islands and thus impose an additional burden on maintenance resources. The high proportion of single-track roads results in the speed of traffic being reduced, in an increased risk of accidents, in higher vehicle operating costs, and in access difficulties for large and heavy vehicles.

But the main difficulty, as I understand it, is that heavy vehicles which use roads floated on peat cause extensive cracking and rutting of the flexible road pavement. Such defects are expensive to repair, and the repairs need to be carried out very frequently. With the new roll-on/roll-off facilities at Castlebay, Lochboisdale, Lochmaddy and Tarbert as well as Stornoway, and with recent important commercial developments such as fish farming—which the hon. Gentleman mentioned—generating additional traffic, the proportion of heavy goods vehicles using both the primary and secondary routes on the islands has increased markedly. Even allowing for the larger lorries having more axles, a 38-tonne lorry causes over 40 times more damage than an eight-tonner.

The ideal solution to these peat-related problems would be to reconstruct the road network completely, particularly the main strategic roads. The peat foundation would be dug out and replaced with rockfill or other suitable material. Where that has been done, the resulting rebuilt roads require significantly less expenditure on repairs or improvement, as well as offer a much more acceptable ride for vehicles. When using roads in the Western Isles, one does not need to be an engineer to know whether the road is solidly based or floating on peat.

In the long run, the council and the Scottish Office accept that reconstructing roads on a hard base is undoubtedly the value-for-money approach to road engineering on the islands. The difficulty, however, is that such wholesale rebuilding of such an extensive network of roads would be prohibitively expensive. It would be quite out of line with the level of resources available now or likely to be available in the foreseeable future. The work therefore cannot be carried out overnight, or even over a few years; it has to be a very long-term programme. That is because the depth of peat on which the roads are floating in some areas is very considerable, and substantial excavation or use of considerable volumes of imported material would be required. What is necessary in the short term, and what the islands council is doing with considerable success, is to target the resources available to priority areas.

Hand in hand with carrying out major improvements such as rebuilding sections of road on a hard base, the council must maintain the other peat-based roads and ensure that the network condition overall is not allowed to deteriorate. Scottish Office officials were extremely impressed by the way in which the council has been programming, designing, constructing, maintaining and improving its road schemes. The council took a policy decision in 1985 that it would devote resources available in four years out of every five single-mindedly to maintaining and improving its primary road network.

In the fifth year, it has concentrated its resources on the top priority minor schemes. The effectiveness of a small operation with two or three engineers properly overseeing the work being done in detail has been very evident. I believe that the council has recently been able, for example, to procure 6 m two-track new road for about £0·5 million per mile and has completed at least 50 per cent. on Lewis and Harris and about 20 per cent. on the southern islands. That is a very competitive rate compared with elsewhere in Scotland, and it represents excellent value for money.

Road engineers on the council recognise that, even now, with the increased traffic levels that I have already described and the further increases which improved services may bring, the flows on the islands roads are and will be extraordinarily low. For example, fewer than 1,000 vehicles per day use the main inter-island route. The council is using modern highway design standards with the fullest permitted deviations for reasons of environment and economy, and without any question of reducing road safety. The islands council has recently built several new single-carriageway improvements on roads with low traffic. The engineers take a pragmatic approach to the use of design standards and are prepared to lower the standards without significantly reducing safety, enforced by reasons of topography, property or economy. That can result in reducing the sheer size of earthworks to a more sympathetic scale.

The Scottish Office roads directorate has congratulated the islands council on its approach, and considers that mainland authorities can learn much from that pragmatic approach to the design of low-traffic roads, including low cost, a good safety record and aesthetic appearance.

Let me refer, however, to matters financial rather than technical. I was very pleased that the Scottish Office was able to find additional resources in 1989-90 and 1990-91 to enable the Western Isles council to build the Vatersay causeway. The full cost of that project—£3·7 million, including additional reconstruction and resurfacing work on a number of single-track roads on Vatersay—was covered by additional capital allocations in those two years. That ensured—we believe this to be extremely important—that the rest of the council's roads programme was not prejudiced. Moreover, 50 per cent. of the eligible costs of the new causeway were met by grant from the European regional development fund, and a further 25 per cent. from the Scottish Office. The new causeway, opened last November, is real evidence of the Scottish Office's commitment to the promotion of development in rural and island areas, and to the maintenance of populations.

I know that, in the longer term, the council will want to consider whether it would be cost-effective to build causeways or bridges to the islands of Berneray, Eriskay and Scalpay. These possible projects, which would inevitably involve substantial expenditure, add to the pressure on resources available. The council must also consider investment in ferry services within the resources allocated to it. Inevitably, therefore, the council will have to take decisions on priorities in the light of the finance that is likely to be available.

I have acknowledged the problems facing the islands council, the impressive work being done by the council's

staff to stretch the resources available to achieve maximum value for money, and the islanders' aspirations for the future.

I recognise that, at the present rate of investment, it may take more than 30 years to complete the work required on the inter-island main route, but I must emphasise that there is no bottomless bag of resources from which roads and transport expenditure, however systematically and efficiently organised, can be funded. The Government's policies are designed to create the conditions necessary for sustained economic growth. This necessarily involves restraining public expenditure to assist in the fight against inflation. We must therefore look at priorities for public expenditure across all services and in all areas very closely indeed.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State each year reaches a view on what proportion of the total resources available in the Scottish block can be devoted to different services. Roads and transport needs must be considered against other services such as education, social work, health and housing. Of the funds he decides to allocate to roads and transport, my right hon. Friend then has to determine how much should be issued to each authority. He is guided in this exercise by the transport policies and programmes documents drawn up by authorities, by their financial plans, and by such other information as my be available. We shall, in due course, study with great interest the council's proposals. Information may also come from reports of officials' visits to the authorities or from additional information submitted by the councils themselves.

It was because the Secretary of State had information from a variety of sources on the clear priority needs for investment in the Western Isles that he was able to agree to increase the Western Isles' final allocation for this year. The percentage increase was higher than for all but one other council in Scotland. That council was Tayside where resources were exceptionally required to replace the flood-damaged Caputh bridge.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the able way in which he has presented his case on behalf of his constituents. I promise him and the Western Isles council that we accept that there are particular problems in the Western Isles. On behalf of the Secretary of State and the Scottish Office, I give the undertaking that the needs of the Western Isles will be carefully, seriously and sympathetically considered against the claims of all other authorities. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having drawn these matters to our attention tonight and for submitting additional evidence, which we shall study with the utmost care.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 9 May 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Thursday 16 May.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Monday 13 May at Seven o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: As the next six Bills have blocking motions, I shall put them together.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 16 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Conservation Bodies

1. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times during the past 12 months he has met representatives of conservation bodies.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I have met representatives of conservation bodies formally on four occasions. My colleagues have also had a number of such meetings.

Mr. Nicholson: My right hon. Friend will know that my interest in the subject derives from the fact that my constituency ranges from the smallest English national park to the Somerset levels. Will he ensure that that land, which is not suitable for intensive and, therefore, fairly profitable farming or for conservation assistance, does not drift into a gentle decline? Will he therefore, as a matter of some urgency, bring forward proposals to ensure that all the countryside is farmed in an environmentally sensitive way?

Mr. Gummer: As my hon. Friend knows, I have had many individual and informal meetings with conservation bodies and I am pleased to find that they increasingly recognise that if the British countryside is to be conserved, it can be only through the activities of farmers. That is why we are insistent that the reform of the common agricultural policy should be driven by a demand for environmental support. The Government are working for that fundamental change, which we hope to achieve.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I hope that, when the Minister meets conservationists in Monmouth next week, he will remind them that Welsh farmers' incomes have dropped by 50 per cent. over the past two years and that 14 per cent. of Welsh farmers are contemplating giving up farming due to the policies of the Secretary of State for Wales, who has full responsibility for agriculture in Wales. The Minister may not be aware that his colleague said yesterday at the annual general meeting of the Farmers Union of Wales in Aberystwyth that there is worse to come. Is that policy due to the advice given by Ministers in London and by the Government?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman's question would go down better were it not known that his party was wholly in favour of the European Community and supported the common agricultural policy. He knows perfectly well that the events about which he is talking are a result of the CAP, which we are committed to changing and which we are fighting to alter. The hon. Gentleman has no possible answers to that. He should not do this and he does so only because it is this week.

Mr. Onslow: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of conserving water resources in the countryside? Will he redouble his efforts to encourage farmers to impound the water from

excessive rainfall in the winter rather than running down river levels by extraction for spray irrigation in the summer?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my right hon. Friend that the problems of water levels, especially in the east of England, are of great seriousness. Happily, even the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) cannot blame the Government for that. The truth is that we shall have to share out the use of water. I was very unhappy about some of the suggestions that the National Rivers Authority put forward originally. I am pleased to say that they have now been considerably revised in a way that will protect the water table and, at the same time, enable farmers to use water as they need it to produce crops. I assure my right hon. Friend that we are looking carefully at the water levels of rivers in which I know that he has a particular interest, which he has pressed regularly to me.

Mr. Dalyell: Why cannot the Minister tell Mr. Ian Richardson and other conservationists in his constituency who is behind the Swiss bond holders who own Heveningham hall, one of the 20 most beautiful houses in England? Does he understand that, as I represent Hopetown and Dalmeny, it would be quite remiss of me as a Member not to know who owns those great houses?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman referred to a matter which is entirely under the control of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be more careful with his comments and I also hope that he will recognise the enormous amount of work that has been carried out to save that particular house——

Mr. Dalyell: It is 20th century restoration of an 18th century house.

Mr. Gummer: —and take that in the context of a long period of misuse of the house by the former owners. Who that former owner was—he is now dead—is no more clear to me than it is to the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and it would be quite improper for me to answer in any other way except to say that I do not know who the owner is.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope to raise the matter in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not legitimate to raise that matter on a supplementary question.

Fishing Vessels

2. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels have taken the gear option as opposed to the tied option.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): One hundred and eighty-five vessels have taken the gear option while 258 have elected to tie up.

Mr. Harris: Although I accept that the gear option is not always practical for many boats in Scotland, does my hon. Friend agree that the number that have taken the alternative route and are tying up is gratifying? Will he accept the congratulations of the House on having fought so hard to ensure that that option was made available in the first place?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend will know that when we entered the Council we faced proposals that included the 120 mm mesh size, a 10-day tie-up and no gear option. We had to fight very hard to get the tie-up limited to eight days and to get the gear option. I am pleased that that has been taken up by about one third of the Scottish fleet. We knew that it would not be appropriate for a large number of vessels and we did not pretend that that was other than the case. However, I hope that it is proving effective for those vessels that can take advantage of it. Tie-up is certainly the preferable option where it will work.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Minister accept that the boats have not elected to tie up but have been forced to tie up? Will he confirm that more Scottish boats are now affected by the regulation than boats in the rest of the European Community put together? Has the Secretary of State for Scotland spoken to the hon. Gentleman about his conduct during the tie-up debate and is the hon. Gentleman now able to apologise to Scotland's fishing communities or, better still, to signal a change of policy?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman says that more Scottish boats are affected than other boats. That is true. The stocks affected are those that are fished predominantly by Scottish fishermen. The rules stated that the boats affected were those with 40 per cent. of cod and haddock in their total catch in areas IV and VI which are fished predominantly by Scottish boats, and those with more than 100 tonnes. The action is imposed by the Community. It is not something which we have dreamt up. In fact, we mitigated that measure. We are acting to conserve stocks for the Scottish fishing industry. That was our sole reason for acting. Had we not done that in respect of stocks of haddock, of which we have 80-odd per cent. of the catch, and stocks of cod, of which we have 50-odd per cent. of the catch, we would have been remiss in our duties.

In the debate, I explained to the hon. Gentleman and to the fishing industry the facts behind the decision and the importance of making it stick. I have no apologies to make about the thoughts that I expressed during that debate, because I was simply expressing the truth. The fishing industry preferred to have the truth presented bluntly than to have it wrapped up in silken phrases that mean nothing.

Mr. David Porter: The tie-up rule clearly means "Thou shalt not fish." Is my hon. Friend aware that in some cases it means "Thou shalt not earn a living"? The fishermen on some boats that are affected claim that they cannot get other work, such as standby and diving support work. Will my hon. Friend undertake to look into that matter?

Mr. Curry: In so far as I can assist, I shall certainly do so. The regulation was imposed upon us by the Community because of concern about stocks. We agreed that the stocks were in a serious condition. We did not say, "There is no problem" or "Let us pretend that the problem does not exist." We sought to obtain the most sensible application of a rule that we had to observe. Having obtained it, we are obliged to enforce that rule, or we will end up next year with an even more inflexible rule from Brussels. It would be in no one's interests if that happened.

I shall look at the cases that my hon. Friend can bring before me, but I cannot alter the rules that we are obliged to follow.

Fish Conservation

3. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for improving conservation of fish stocks.

7. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he intends to make to the July Council of Fisheries Ministers on the conservation of fish stocks.

Mr. Curry: We have already announced unilateral conservation action to apply from July. My immediate priority now is to achieve greater selectivity of gear on a Community-wide basis.

Mr. Mitchell: As we have a conservation crisis in the North sea in particular, a proper system of conservation would require a ban on industrial fishing, a ban on bream trawling and a ban on fishing in spawning grounds during the spawning season. It would also require a ban on square mesh panels, a one-net rule and a series of such measures. Why is not the Minister developing a proper British conservation programme instead of sitting there like a Saudi kleptomaniac with a hands-off policy, waiting for the Commission to do it all by such daft measures as the eight-day lay-up?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman knows the facts. He cannot complain simultaneously that we are not introducing our own measures and that we are about to impose measures on the United Kingdom fleet because of the importance of the stocks that we must conserve. It is a difficult choice. We have not been afraid to take that choice. Many of the matters that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are in the United Kingdom proposals—for example, the single-net rule, which is applicable. Other measures can be proposed only by the Community. Where we have national scope, it must be within the framework of the Community rules. That is why we had to apply, for example, a 90 mm square mesh panel in a 90 mm net. We did not have the flexibility to go beyond that proposal. We have not hesitated to take those actions. Where we have taken those actions, they have hardly been greeted with overwhelming acclaim by the fishing industry.

Mr. Irvine: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the main problems with the conservation of fish stocks is that, while the British Government play by the rules and take effective enforcement measures against our own fishermen, too many other European Governments do not properly apply the rules against their own fishermen? Will my hon. Friend take care at the Council meeting in July to make that point forcefully to his European counterparts?

Mr. Curry: Because of our desire to have effective conservation, we defended at the previous Council meeting, and will do so at future Council meetings, the basic idea that the common fisheries policy should be enforced by the member states in the waters that they control. We can impose that system on all vessels fishing in those waters. If that policy disintegrated and enforcement were handed over to some centralised control, or if we were to slacken our enforcement, I fear that we would then have differentials.

Certain member states enforce rules strongly. The Dutch, for example, impose a tie-up on their own fishermen and are suggesting that the tie-up should become the principal instrument of Community conservation. We would have great difficulty with that, but we will certainly do our best to make sure that we get a proper level of enforcement. That is one respect in which the United Kingdom is acknowledged to be ahead of the field.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said last week on a visit to Scotland that fishermen had to take an initiative in conservation. Will he confirm that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation put to the Government a comprehensive conservation package almost two years ago, that the industry has also proposed a decommissioning scheme and that some sections of the industry have actually advocated that the industry make a contribution to a decommissioning scheme? Will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to clarify the confusion at the recent meeting between Scottish fishery leaders and Ministers on the Government's position on decommissioning and say whether the door is still open to some form of decommissioning scheme, possibly involving an industry contribution?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend has made it absolutely clear that he is ready to examine any workable proposal for the industry that is based on an industry-funded scheme and would deliver long-term conservation gains. That is a perfectly clear statement. The hon. Gentleman said that the industry brought forward its proposals two years ago, which is true. Those proposals were based on 90 mm mesh with an 80 mm panel.

We tried to get those policies accepted in Brussels, but they were not acceptable. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has now understood that. I understand that it recently introduced proposals, accepting that it should go further on the size of the square mesh panel, but that there are also other conditions. The industry is moving and recognises that it must move forward, and we welcome that fact. As I said, we are willing to look at a package of measures that will assist the industry, provided we get effective gains which would be in the interests of the fishermen. It is their futures that are at risk.

Sir Michael Shaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that fishermen in my constituency fully realise the need for conservation, but that, at the same time, they demand fairness in the enforcement of the restrictions on gear and quotas throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Curry: I appreciate the thrust of my hon. Friend's comments. Although our fishermen fish for different stocks in different vessels, we must ensure that they all play by the same rules. We can hardly complain about other people failing in this regard if we do not maintain effective enforcement around our own coasts. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the enforcement authority in Scotland has now become an agency. I am extremely confident that that agency will make a great contribution to enforcement practices north of the border. We shall ensure that that is the case south of the border also.

Dr. Godman: The Minister said a moment ago that the eight-day tie-up was imposed upon him by the Fisheries Ministers Council. I must question the accuracy of that statement because Mr. Marin, the European Commissioner for Fisheries, said that that proposal came originally from the Minister's Department. Is not the truth of the matter the fact that the fleet is too big and has to be reduced and that the most humane and fair-minded way of doing that is by a decommissioning scheme?

Mr. Curry: No, it is not true that that scheme originated in my Department. It originated with the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas, which stated that there must be a 30 per cent. reduction in effort. The Commission translated that into a 10-day tie-up per month. We got that reduced to eight days, for various reasons, partly because we thought that it was excessive.

We must have effective effort control. We cannot dodge that issue. That is why it is important that we enforce the rules effectively this year and that fishermen obey them because, if they do not, there is a danger that we will be faced with an even more draconian scheme next year which, like everything else, will go through on majority voting. We are anxious to avoid that. That is why it is important to make the proposals work this year.

Mr. Morley: During these exchanges hon. Members have expressed the need to link conservation measures with a reduction of effort. I was recently in Brussels to talk to the fisheries directorate-general, which expressed great surprise at the fact that, of all the countries in Europe, this country has not taken the opportunity of using the EC funds that are available for decommissioning schemes in order to reduce that effort. I agree that we need a package of measures and that, on its own, decommissioning would not be adequate. However, will the Minister give the House the undertaking that he will make it a priority to discuss with the industry a total package on conservation and, above all, on effort limitation, which would involve fair compensation for the fishermen who have suffered so much as a result of the measures to reduce the pressure on fish stocks?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister has already begun that debate with the fishing industry. We accept that we can put together a package of measures that will be of benefit to the industry, and it is essential that we do so because we are talking about the long-term future of the stocks.

On the capacity problem, may I point out to the hon. Gentleman what I am sure he already knows: when we finally receive the figures for the first guidance programme from Brussels, we will find that the United Kingdom is over target by much less than was originally suspected. We do not have any idea about the targets for the second programme and, until we have them, it is clearly a little premature to talk about how we can reach a target that does not yet exist. However, we have begun discussions on a sensible package of proposals and we shall pursue them.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have spent rather a long time on fishing, but I recognise its importance. We must now get on more rapidly in the interest of those hon. Members who have questions on the Order Paper.

Whales

4. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the proposal at the International Whaling Commission to review the moratorium on the killing of certain species of whale.

Mr. Gummer: I have received a very great number of representations, many expressing appreciation of the Government's strong stand on the conservation of whales.

Mr. Archer: Although I do not dissent from that statement, will the Minister take the opportunity to confirm that our common ecological heritage is as much a legitimate subject of international law as our common security? Will he give an undertaking that the Government will do everything possible to give effect to the overwhelming consensus among civilised countries in favour of the continuing enforcement of the moratorium, if necessary by trade embargoes on those countries that ignore it?

Mr. Gummer: I have made it absolutely clear that there is no case for raising the moratorium and we are using every possible pressure to ensure that it continues. We have been successful in using the framework of the International Whaling Commission. It has a lot of faults and we want to extend its framework to cover some of the small cetaceans which some people believe are not covered, although we believe that many are. We have a lot of work to do and we should press on and make sure that the protection of whales continues.

Mr. Skinner: Introduce legislation and stop blubbering.

Mr. Gummer: It is all right for the hon. Gentleman to make comments from below the Gangway, but some of us take seriously the conservation of whales and do not make jokes about it.

Mr. Ashby: Does my right hon. Friend understand that most people in Britain find whaling abhorrent and extend that feeling to the fishing of porpoises? Countries such as Japan are fishing thousands of porpoises for no real reason. Is there any possibility of extending the moratorium?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right, particularly about Dall's porpoise. The Japanese have carried out a major attack on that species and I am concerned to extend the controls. However, we have used the present framework effectively up to now. I am determined that we should use it more effectively in future. No one must be in any doubt about our commitment to the protection of the whale.

Dr. David Clark: Is the Minister aware that there is deep concern in Britain about what is regarded as the abuse of scientific whaling, especially by Japan? Will the Minister give us a categorical assurance that he will oppose commercial whaling and tighten up scientific whaling so that it is not abused by other countries in future?

Mr. Gummer: I made it clear as long ago as the conference in Brighton that the Government are wholly opposed to scientific whaling being used as a cover for commercial whaling. We shall continue to fight that. We are particularly concerned that not just one but a number

of nations have signified their intention to extend their whaling activities. In today's circumstances, that is clearly unacceptable.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that whales are slaughtered throughout the world in barbaric ways and that the numbers of many species are getting rather low? The management of the slaughter of whales is deplorable. Will my right hon. Friend give the House an assurance this afternoon that he will not agree to anything until he is satisfied that those dreadful trends have been reversed?

Mr. Gummer: The history of monitoring and controlling whaling shows a very poor record. One reason why we are concerned about management proposals is that management has been very bad in the past. I see no sign that the problems are being overcome. We have succeeded much beyond our expectations so far. Our job is to make sure that we continue to do so.

EC Surplus Food

6. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that EC food distribution is available to all pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I see no reason to provide free food for people like my noble Friend Baroness Trumpington or the hon. Gentleman's friend the chairman of Mirror Group Newspapers.

Mr. Cryer: When the Minister has finished with his little sneers at pensioners, does he realise that men and women who fought for this country in the war have queued up to find, when they get to the end of the queue, that they are denied butter which they have paid for, since the Government have handed over £14 billion to the Common Market in the past 10 years because of their arbitrary impositions? Would not it be a decent gesture to allow all pensioners to have that little bit of butter, especially since some charities—the public schools of this country, where the sons and daughters of the wealthy go —are also eligible for free butter?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the scheme from his days in the European Parliament. He will be aware that there are 3,000 tonnes of beef and 3,800 tonnes of butter. He will therefore be able to do the mathematics. If they were distributed to all those eligible and all pensioners, they would each get the princely amount of 7·5 oz of beef and 9·5 oz of butter. If that is the gesture that we are about to make to them, I expect that I would get a gesture in return.

Mrs. Gorman: Although I have no objection to the distribution of surplus food to pensioners or anyone else, does my hon. Friend agree that pensioner families, like all others in this country, are now contributing £830 a year on average to the common agricultural policy and pensioners, like the rest of our families, would rather have that money in their pockets to spend on the food that they choose to buy?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that the way to deal with surpluses is to tackle them at source so that they cost less to ordinary people and to those on relatively modest wages. The surplus should not be perpetuated and then dished out free, because that is most inefficient. If there is food to be distributed, the United Kingdom will have its share and it will go to the poorest people in society, which is the right way to do it. I am determined that that should happen. However, the thesis that my hon. Friend proposes is the sensible one—not to produce surpluses in the first place, which would cost us all less.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the totally inadequate answer to my question and the fact that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) described Bradford pensioners as stupid, I reserve the right to raise this matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Holt: He has no right to do that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman kindly contain himself. It is perfectly legitimate for the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) to say that he will raise the matter on the Adjournment. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) has been here long enough to know the rules.

Mr. Holt: I am right.

Mr. Speaker: Unless the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) contains himself I shall have to ask him to leave the Chamber for this afternoon. Will he please be quiet.

Common Agricultural Policy

8. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: The reform of the common agricultural policy was considered at the meeting of the Agriculture Council on 22 and 23 April, where discussions concentrated on the Commission's 1991 agricultural price proposals.

Mr. Welsh: This is beginning to get close to "The Muppet Show".

When the Minister meets his European counterparts, will they do something about the plight of the soft fruit industry, especially the Scottish raspberry industry, which is under threat from a flood of cheap eastern European imports? Is he aware of the importance of raspberries, not only in terms of direct employment but for the transportation industries? Will he obtain an extension of the minimum import price system until the end of this year and, in the long term, seek to maintain a stable market through quantitive controls?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman will know that my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) has kept that matter very much in my mind. Therefore, on every occasion when it has been possible I have raised the matter in the European Community. I have obtained a further extension of four months, but that is not enough. However, more important than the extension is ensuring that it is monitored. The hon. Gentleman will know that I have strong objections to the way in which the Commission has so far failed to monitor properly the arrangements which it put in place at our insistence. I am perfectly well aware of the importance of the Scottish raspberry industry and the soft fruit industry to the United Kingdom. We need to provide a market for eastern

European products and to insist that that market is at a price similar to that which we get at home. Otherwise the benefit goes to the processor, not to the eastern European country. The disbenefit is to the British farmer. I am determined that, as far as it is possible to find new ways to press the European Commumnity, we shall do so. I believe that the Commission has let us down on this issue.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of continuing arguments in some circles that nitrogen quotas should form part of a reformed CAP, may I ask my right hon. Friend to take this opportunity to explain his continued opposition to that argument?

Mr. Gummer: I could give my hon. Friend a large number of reasons. First, it could not be policed; secondly, what does one do about natural nitrogen that comes from farmyard manure; thirdly, how do we make sure that others keep the rules, even if Britain were able to police such a system; fourthly, how could one ensure that it was a fair system; fifthly, how would rationing be done in countries where the authorities have no idea what people used in the previous year, anyway; and, sixthly—well I could give a number of other reasons which would all go to show that the system would be unworkable.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister realise that while Opposition Members support the Government in resisting the details of the MacSharry proposals for the reform of the CAP, we still believe that there must be a fundamental reform if we are to get a fair deal for the British consumer and farmer? The Minister should take the high ground. Will he take the offensive and table his proposals for reform of the CAP so that we can start arguing on our terms rather than on MacSharry's terms?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the public recognise that the hon. Gentleman's willingness to advise others stops short of his willingness to learn that proposals cannot be tabled at the EC in that way. Proposals are tabled only by the Commission. I am determined to see that the Commission's new proposals contain our suggestions. I have put those proposals forward absolutely clearly.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will answer a question that is now being widely asked. In the event of there being a future Labour Government who would cut spending on the national health services, as the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) said yesterday, how much would the hon. Gentleman cut from the support given to farmers?

Animals (Live Exports)

9. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects final decisions to be taken regarding the future of minimum values on the export of live horses and ponies; and if he will make a statement.

10. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the draft directive on the transportation of live animals to be next discussed at a meeting of the European Community Council.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): EC discussions have recently resumed on the welfare of animals during transport, but we will resist most strongly any proposals to resume the export of live horses and ponies.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of the passionate concern that exists across the country about the continued pressure on the Commissioners to end minimum values in 1992 on the export of live horses and ponies? Animals would end up being brutally and viciously slaughtered if they were exported in that way. Will he shake up the EC and seek an early assurance that if the EC's present plans go forward, horses and ponies will not be exported from this country after 1992 in such an inhumane way?

Mr. Maclean: The only good thing about the present proposals is that they unite the Government and all the welfare organisations, including excellent bodies such as the International League for the Protection of Horses. I assure my hon. Friend that we are in harness on this issue, along with all the British people, in arguing to keep our specific minimum value proposals. I am not interested in getting an early decision from Brussels. I am determined to get the right one and that should be that we do not have to resume the export of live horses and ponies.

Mr. Burns: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Chelmsford warmly welcome the efforts that are being made by him and his Department on minimum values, but are disgusted and dismayed at the prospect of the live exportation of animals across the continent as a result of EC measures? In view of the improvements in refrigeration in the 30 years since the signing of the treaty of Rome, why must animals be subjected to such inhumane transportation practices, despite the efforts that are being made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food improve the arrangements? We beg the Minister to fight hard in Europe to put an end to this Euro-nonsense.

Mr. Maclean: Animals have been and can be transported safely across international boundaries. Britain has had the most comprehensive detailed regulations on the safe transport of animals for many years. We take as our starting point in EC negotiations the excellent British regulations and we suggest that they should be the basis on which the EC comes up with proposals on the movement of animals to apply to the whole of Europe. We are also keen to encourage an EC-wide inspectorate so that the high standards of animal welfare that we enforce in this country will be enforced throughout Europe.

Mr. Corbett: I welcome the fact that the Minister is so firmly opposed to the export of ponies and horses, but why does not he apply his opposition to the transport of calves and sheep? Will he acknowledge that it is impossible for this country to ensure that the arrangements and regulations in place in the rest of Europe are enforced? Would not it be sensible to promote a policy of slaughter as near to the point of production as possible?

Mr. Maclean: We have always transported cattle and sheep safely and believe that it can be done. The hon. Gentleman should realise the conditions of the EC treaty, under which we have no power unilaterally to ban the transport of live animals. We make a distinction in the case of horses and ponies, however, because we believe that, from a welfare point of view, they are quite distinct. The

sad, sordid history of their export shows that they cannot be transported safely but only at great risk of damage. Cattle and sheep can be moved safely round the country and are moved safely from Ireland and the Scottish islands to the mainland. We must be very careful before seeking a unilateral ban on the safe movement of animals which would severely disadvantage many parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that, although he has widespread support in resisting moves to transport horses and ponies, it is essential that he makes no concessions in securing the best possible transport of animals or with regard to ponies and horses? The House will accept no concessions. Should not the Government be doing more to encourage the transportation of meat by hook rather than on the hoof?

Mr. Maclean: I cannot dictate to consumers, particularly European consumers, in what form they should eat their food. Although I sympathise with the view that much more meat could be safely transported in carcase rather than live form, it is a fact of life that Europeans want a live meat trade and the EC treaty protects that wish. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall not enter negotiations with the view that we must start off with concessions, as that would not be sensible. Rather, we shall enter those negotiations on the basis that the excellent British rules have served us well, that they should be extended to the rest of Europe and that we do not intend to give way on the issue of the export of live horses and ponies.

Dame Janet Fookes: May I encourage my hon. Friend in his insistence on an international inspectorate for the export of animals throughout Europe? However, does he agree that unless those inspectors are given real powers, their existence will be useless?

Mr. Maclean: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. Our experience of the EC international inspectorate for abattoirs suggests that those inspectors have considerable powers and that their powers work. We would wish for no less on the animal welfare front. Britain has nothing to be ashamed of and is among the countries with the best record on animal welfare in Europe. We would welcome an EC-wide inspectorate to enforce our high standards in other parts of the EC.

EC Expenditure

15. **Mr. Ralph Howell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* overall European Commission expenditure as a percentage of overall European Community gross domestic product, *(b)* net European Commission expenditure on agriculture as a percentage of overall European Community gross domestic product and *(c)* the net United Kingdom expenditure on agriculture including net receipts from the European Commission as a proportion of United Kingdom gross domestic product, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Gummer: The figures are 0·9 per cent., 0·6 per cent. and 0·24 per cent.

Mr. Howell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does not it prove that some of the statements that he has made about the high cost of agricultural support have been grossly exaggerated? Will he also bear in mind the fact that British agriculture is supported even less than European agriculture and we are spending less than a quarter of the amount on agricultural support than we were in 1960 and only half what we were spending in 1973 when we joined the EC?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend must accept that the budget is likely to go up by 30 per cent. next year, which cannot be sensible in the present circumstances. It must be reasonable to bring the budget under control and ensure that a higher proportion of it reaches the farmers whom it is supposed to support. I do not think that we help the situation by arguing on the basis of the percentage of gross national product.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. Janner: Does the Prime Minister know of the grave shortage of resources that is affecting children's wards and units in hospitals throughout Britain? Is he aware that the unique baby life-saving unit in Groby Road hospital in my constituency is likely to have to close because there is no money locally and the Department of Health has refused central NHS funding? If that unit closes, as is almost certain unless the Government change their mind, what will the Prime Minister say to the parents of babies who will certainly die, totally unnecessarily?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. and learned Gentleman will know, I cannot carry in my head the details of each and every aspect of the national health service, but he knows that the average annual increase in the national health service budget has been more than 3 per cent. during the period of this Government—substantially higher than it was under any previous Government.

Sir Michael Shaw: If public spending is to be paid for in the future by increases in our economy, in the opinion of my right hon. Friend do policies of increased taxation, increases in quangos and Ministries and a minimum wage level make a sensible policy to increase such a demand?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that I know what my hon. Friend is driving at. The reality is that the Labour party would never deliver any growth whatsoever to fund increased public expenditure. It never has and never would and any suggestion that it would is sheer wish fantasy.

Mr. Kinnock: Has the Prime Minister seen the letter from the health authority district general manager to his clinical directors stating that

"the reality of GPs holding their own . . . budgets"

is that

"equity has gone out the window"?

In view of that, will the Prime Minister withdraw the claim that he made in the House on Tuesday that operations are done on the basis of clinical need, as that claim is obviously fiction?

The Prime Minister: It is not fiction. Operations are done on the basis of clinical need. I have been advised within the last hour or so that the doctor to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred has also said that the big advantage of the trusts is that you are opting out of bureaucracy, not out of the national health service. At Bart's, the hospital at which he works, they are treating more patients at less cost. Over 1,000 jobs may have gone in the last five years, but more patients are being treated.

Mr. Kinnock: Since the Prime Minister also wants to quote Dr. Grant, I remind him that he is the man who said that they are opting out of equity. Can I put it to the Prime Minister again? Is not it clear that the Prime Minister's health market policies have now made queue-jumping the order of the day and that the clinical needs of patients are coming second to commercial considerations? I put it to him again. In view of that reality, on the testimony of Dr. Grant, will he now withdraw the false claim that he made two days ago that operations are done on the basis of clinical need? It is fiction.

The Prime Minister: No, I will not, and I will call in evidence to support my position Mr. Rowden, the chief executive of West Lambeth health authority, who writes to the press as a nurse, a general manager in the national health service and a member of the Labour party. I quote:

"For Labour to suggest that the old-style district health authorities provided a sound basis for the management of the NHS is spurious to say the least. Decisions prior to the reforms were arrived at by a process of those who screamed the loudest, and we have all witnessed various displays of shroud-waving . . . This was not a rational way of making difficult decisions, and perhaps the key benefit from the NHS reforms will be the evolution of a system that will lead to rational and informed debate about how and why we use precious resources in our NHS."

Mr. Kinnock: Like his predecessor, the more the Prime Minister goes on in his answers, the less convincing he becomes. May I put it to him again? Does not he agree with the testimony of one of his supporters, a district general manager, who says that because of his system equity has gone out of the window? Will not he affirm now that, as a consequence, operations are not being done on the basis of clinical need but on the basis of commercial considerations?

The Prime Minister: I neglected inadvertently to complete the quote from Mr. Rowden, the Labour party supporter. He deals with the point that the right hon. Gentleman now raises:

"When all the politicking stops, it has to be said that many of the Government's changes to the NHS give us the first opportunity in decades to begin explicitly to make choices about where we spend our money in the UK health care system."

Mr. Harris: Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that, unlike the Labour party, he will keep public expenditure in line with what the country can afford? Furthermore, as the First Lord of the Treasury, will he make available to Her Majesty's Opposition the full facilities of the Treasury to check out their taxation and spending plans, as clearly their sums do not add up?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. Our economic policies in the last 12 years have achieved a remarkable treble—tax cuts, spending increases on public services and a reduction in the national debt. The extra £20 billion that Labour promises is spending that it could never deliver out of growth which it has never previously provided when in government. The only things that would grow under the Labour party would be taxes, inflation and national health service waiting lists, just as they always have done.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister realise that while the scale of international relief in Bangladesh is still pitiful in relation to need, there is nevertheless real pride about Britain's lead in providing it? I again ask the Prime Minister why it is that he, his Government and, it appears, the written press continue to ignore the incalculably greater scale of the disaster now unfolding in Africa? I want the right hon. Gentleman to assure the House that he knows and understands that 27 million lives are imminently at risk and that in some areas food will run out at the end of this week. If he knows about these matters, will he tell the House what he intends to do to help?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said in the first part of his question. The assistance that we have given to Bangladesh has made us the largest single national donor. We are prepared to do more and are urging others to do more. Particularly in the months ahead we will need to seek a better international way of co-ordinating assistance when great tragedies such as this are faced. I shall do what I can to bring that sort of system about. On the subject of Africa, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that we are providing substantial aid and providing it fast. After the United States, we are the second largest bilateral food aid contributor to the Horn. We have done a great deal and, where necessary, we will be able to do more. However, we cannot do everything that is necessary on our own. We have a better record than almost anyone in the world and we can justly be proud of that record.

Mr. Butcher: Is my right hon. Friend aware that 12 years ago to this day he and I first entered the House? I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his personal dedication and commitment to an improvement in public services throughout that period. If the history of the 1980s shows anything it is that it is possible to reduce taxation while simultaneously and dramatically improving public services.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right about that. Perhaps I may take this opportunity to welcome my hon. Friend back to the House after his illness. We are all very pleased to see him here and looking so fit and I look forward to seeing him sit here with me for at least another 12 years and possibly a good deal longer. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Such improvements depend on the levels of growth that we have achieved over the last decade, which levels Conservative Governments traditionally achieve and Labour Governments fail to achieve.

Q2. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: As the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Energy both oppose test drilling by Nirex in their constituencies, does the Prime Minister understand why the people of Scotland do not wish to see up to 6,000 planned test boreholes being drilled in Caithness? If Nirex proposes to spend such time, effort and money in drilling up to 6,000 boreholes, how can the Prime Minister expect anyone to believe that Nirex has not targeted the north of Scotland as a nuclear dump? Scotland has been badly let down by this decision.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, there will need to be quite specific planning consents before there can be any dumping of waste there. That matter lies in the future, but before any dumping at all could take place after the test borings, quite specific planning consents would need to be granted. We will look carefully at those when they come forward.

Q3. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my right hon. Friend accept that when we came to office 12 years ago the top rate of taxation was 82 per cent., that it is now 40 per cent. and that the miracle has happened because everyone has been encouraged to work harder which has meant that £17 billion more has been spent on the health service this year than when we came to office? Does he agree that a nightmare will strike people such as a police sergeant, a deputy head teacher or a doctor when they hear that if they earn £20,300 a year they are among the rich and are to be taxed and taxed and taxed again.

The Prime Minister: That would certainly do nothing but damage to enterprise; and it is certainly true that, over the past few years, lower rates of tax have produced a higher yield.

My hon. Friend is right about people earning £20,000 a year. In no sense can they be described as rich. Last year in London and the south-east £20,000 was less than the average white collar wage and it will certainly be much less this year. It is less than many Metropolitan police constables and sergeants, senior house officers, registrars or junior doctors earn. It is less than many teachers earn. Those are the people whom the Opposition regard as rich and whom they would tax not only unreasonably but as they did in the 1970s: right out of this country.

Q4. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brown: As the poll tax has been a big mistake, why should people be hounded and imprisoned in England? Why should they suffer because the Government got it wrong? People outside think that something has to give —that there should be an amnesty. The Government should understand the position of the 16 individuals in England—*[Laughter.]* It is not funny.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This does not help the hon. Gentleman. Briefly, please.

Mr. Brown: Those 16 people are in prison because they did not pay the poll tax. We know that the Prime Minister claims to want a classless society—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman now conclude his question?

Mr. Brown: This is important, because people cannot be imprisoned in Scotland but they can be in England. Let us free these political prisoners. That would be an important decision.

The Prime Minister: I know that the hon. Gentleman feels deeply about these matters, but I must point out that he did not even carry his own side of the House with him in his remarks.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that I take points of order after Question Time.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 13 MAY—Motion for spring Adjournment.

Motion on the Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 14 MAY—Opposition day (11th allotted day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate described as "The damage caused to the NHS by the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act". Afterwards there will be a debate described as "The need for improved policies to deal with famine, flood and refugees in the world". Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

WEDNESDAY 15 MAY—Debate on a motion to approve the Government's public expenditure plans for 1991-92 to 1993-94 (Cm. 1501 to 1520).

Motion relating to the Education (Grant-Maintained Schools) (Finance) Regulations.

THURSDAY 16 MAY—Remaining stages of Planning and Compensation Bill [Lords].

FRIDAY 17 MAY—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 20 MAY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 15 May at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows:—

Committee A—Document No. 5491/91 relating to milk quotas.

Committee B to continue to consider document No. 8597/90 and COR 1 relating to unfair terms in consumer contracts.

[Wednesday 15 May
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Document
5491/91 Milk Quotas: Outgoers (ECJ Ruling)
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-xvii (1990-91)

European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Document
8597/90 + COR 1 Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 11-xxxiii (1989-90) and HC 29-xii (1990-91)]

Mr. Grocott: May I thank the Leader of the House for arranging, for next Wednesday, a debate on the Government's public expenditure plans? I am afraid that that is the only thing for which I shall be able to thank him.

I know that what I am about to say upsets the right hon. Gentleman and that he will be annoyed again today, but I have to point out that the Government are running out of steam. Why is it that the two key debates next week—the one on the crisis in the health service, and the one on the famine in Bangladesh and Africa and the problems facing the Kurds—have been arranged by us in Opposition time, and that the Government have arranged no major debates on national issues in Government time? As the Leader of the House is running short of ideas, I put it to him that, for a start, it is high time we had a debate on unemployment. Yesterday, 10,000 redundancies were announced at British Coal and Rolls-Royce, making 15,000 in the last 15 days.

It is also high time for a debate on the education service. The Prime Minister seems to think that that service is important, but not important enough for a debate. Let me make an offer to the Leader of the House: if he cannot think of key issues for debate, let him hand over the precious parliamentary time to the Opposition, and we shall choose the subjects.

Mr. MacGregor: Once again, the hon. Gentleman has got himself completely in a twist. He really cannot make that case. After all, I have been urged for some time by his hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House to arrange a debate on public expenditure plans. According to the hon. Gentleman, we are wasting the time of the House next week by doing just that. It is absolutely ridiculous. As I have told the hon. Gentleman before, I am keen to have a debate on public expenditure plans. I am anxious that we should have a whole day to compare the Government's achievements in public expenditure with the nonsense that the Labour party talks. I am glad to have been able to provide such an opportunity. When the hon. Gentleman himself has asked for the debate, he cannot accuse me of wasting the time of the House.

As to the point about unemployment, I need only remind the hon. Gentleman of the spring Adjournment debate. As he knows, I have an obligation to find time for such a debate, which provides an opportunity to raise these matters. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not saying that the Planning and Compensation Bill is unimportant. In fact, it is an extremely important part of the Government's legislative programme, welcomed by very many people. The same is true of the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill. The hon. Gentleman is trying to score cheap points, and he is completely off target.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend make arrangements for a very early debate on the document issued on 3 May by the presidency of the intergovernmental conference on European political union? Will he ensure that in such a debate a Government spokesman will comment on the section about a proposed European foreign policy, which might be held together by qualified majority voting? Will he please make sure that the Government will emphasise that, while they are prepared to be polite and correct to our allies in the EC, they have set their face like granite against ceding any more sovereignty from this House, this Parliament and the British people to the institutions of the EC?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise my hon. Friend an early debate on the IGC in particular. However, he will know that we have regular debates on European

developments. I hope, shortly after the recess, to be able to arrange such a debate, in which all these points may be discussed.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Can the Leader of the House confirm the rumour that the Government are to set up a Northern Ireland Select Committee? Such a Committee would be very welcome indeed, but would seem rather out of place in view of the fact that the Government have failed to set up a Scottish Select Committee.

On the subject of Select Committees, will the right hon. Gentleman find time to debate the very valuable report from the Select Committee on the Environment on the tropical rain forest?

Mr. MacGregor: I have indicated that I recognise that the second subject is obviously very important, but it is a question of finding time, because we are debating many important subjects both in legislation and in ordinary debates at the present time. On the first point, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the Government's response to the Committee on Procedure's report on Select Committees, from which he will see very clearly our position on the Northern Ireland Select Committee.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): As it is now some years since the House held a debate on civil aviation, and in view of the many changes that have taken place since that time, ranging through matters of regulation, competition and, indeed, safety, would not it be appropriate for us to hold a debate on this important matter at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted my hon. Friend's request, but, while in no way wishing to diminish the importance of the subjects that he raises, I do not think that it will be possible for me to find time for a full debate on these matters in the near future. There are, of course, a number of other ways in which they could be raised in the House, including the motion for the spring Adjournment next Monday.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is the Leader of the House aware that his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Foreign Office still decline to publish the text of the draft treaty on political union? It so happens that the text of the treaty is available in the Library owing to the initiative of the Library in obtaining it, which makes this an absurdity as well as an insult to the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider very carefully indeed what further progress can be made in getting Ministers to make periodic reports to the House on the state of the negotiations as they proceed, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) did when he was Prime Minister and we were negotiating the original treaty of British entry?

Mr. MacGregor: As far as the document is concerned, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, he and I and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, have had a number of exchanges on this in the past few weeks in an attempt to find a solution acceptable to the House. As he also knows, this is an intergovernmental conference and it would be wrong for the Government to deposit negotiating texts while it continues. We did not do so during the negotiations on the Single European Act, and the presidency has enjoined member states not to publicise conference texts. However, that negotiating draft text did get into the public domain and that is how it is now in the Library.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle)? Civil aviation has not been debated for a long time and it is now clear that negotiations are commencing to replace the agreement between this country and the United States, Bermuda 2. In view of the controversy that has surrounded recent negotiations, is it not time that the House had an opportunity to put its view forward to guide Her Majesty's Government?

Mr. MacGregor: I have certainly noticed my hon. Friend's comments in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) and I will draw them to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. However, there are other ways in which these matters can be debated in the House and a ministerial reply can be given. I must be honest with my hon. Friend: I think that it will be difficult to find Government time for a full day's debate in the near future.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Reverting to the topic of the non-publication of this so-called non-paper, which is, in fact, a draft treaty of political union, is the Leader of the House aware that the authorities of the House, using their ingenuity, have obtained a copy from the library of the Luxembourg Parliament? Does he agree that the House should be at least as well officially informed as any Parliament of any of the member states of the EEC? Why should proposals on the important subject of the welfare of animals, about which we are all concerned, be available and be debated in the House when working documents concerning the constitution of a new pan-European state are kept secret?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already described the previous practice on these matters and that is what we have followed in this case. The hon. Gentleman knows that I try to help the House whenever possible. We have endeavoured to make arrangements to ensure that some of these drafts are available in the Library to hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the present practice is simply not acceptable to the House? The position on the draft treaty on economic and monetary union is the same. It is absurd for the presidency to say that it will not release the papers. The House is unable to have official knowledge of them although they are circulating far and wide throughout the Community. Will he ensure that the Government make representations to the presidency to say that this is an intolerable situation and that we will not put up with it?

Mr. MacGregor: I will certainly discuss the matter further with my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Clearly, I tried to ensure that hon. Members who wish to follow these matters in detail are able to do so because the documents are now accessible to them.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshaw): The right hon. Gentleman wrote to me recently about the report to the Government on resettlement grant. Can he say now when he intends to table the necessary motion, or will he be able to do so early next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point, because I know that it is a matter of concern to many hon. Members. As he knows, I announced that we had received the review by the Top Salaries Review Body on resettlement grant, which has been placed in the Library of the House. I have made it clear that it will be my intention to bring forward the necessary resolution to implement that recommendation, because it will widely commend itself to hon. Members of all parties. I very much hope that I shall be able to table the resolution and that it will be agreed by the House, if it so wishes, before the Whitsun recess.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I thank my right hon. Friend for rearranging the adjourned debates in European Standing Committee B? May I also ask him whether he can find some way to inform the House and those whom the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) calls the permanent members of such Committees of what is likely to come up in future? Will my right hon. Friend also find some way to let such information be known to outside groups, because I fear that only those advised by expert lobbyists will be able to get their views to the hon. Members who will consider some of the draft directives? In practice, outside groups should know what is going on here and in Europe without having to pay others to tell them.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I suspect that some of the problems about advance information also occurred when these matters were normally debated on the Floor of the House. I take my hon. Friend's point. It is desirable that as much notice as is realistic in all the circumstances should be given to members of the Standing Committee. I said earlier that I should like that to happen and I am pursuing the matter further to ensure that it does. I should be happy to listen to members of the Standing Committee on such matters, because my hon. Friend makes a reasonable point.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I am sure that the whole House would want to avert another mini-De Lorean scandal in Northern Ireland. There is perceived to be a veritable can of worms relating to the stewardship of Northern Ireland Electricity by its chief executive. Can the Leader of the House make time available for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make a further report on NIE so that we can ask him whether he has confidence in that board, whether he has confidence in the chief executive and in his ability, and whether he is likely to reappoint him in view of the heavy rumour that the NIE board does not intend to reappoint the chief executive? That would also afford us the opportunity to ask the Secretary of State whether it is his intention to reappoint the deputy chairman when his contract comes to an end later this year.

Mr. MacGregor: I will draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I am afraid that I do not know the details of those matters.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): In view of the scurrilous and inaccurate reports in some of the tabloid newspapers this week about the working hours of Members of Parliament, does my right hon. Friend think that it is time that we had a high-profile debate on the accepted duties of Members of Parliament, on the hours that we work in this place and on the necessary reforms which need to be considered soberly and carefully so that we can, perhaps, bring ourselves more up to date? Such a debate would impress on the public the fact that Members of Parliament, by and large, do a good job.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that we need a debate on how Members of Parliament fulfil their duties. My hon. Friend makes two points. I should be happy to agree with him that the amount of time that we spend in the Chamber or in Parliament itself does not reflect the amount of time that we spend on our duties as Members of Parliament. As an example of that, I—and I am sure that this applies to many other hon. Members—spent a large number of hours over the weekend in constituency engagements on a bank holiday. It is necessary to keep repeating that the duties of Members of Parliament are not just reflected by the amount of time they sit in the Chamber.

With regard to reforms, I have said that I am considering those matters and I hope to come forward with some thoughts in due course. However, some of the reforms that we have carried through in this Parliament, such as the European Standing Committees, are already having an effect on the hours in this Chamber.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House make time available as soon as possible for a debate on the Government's policies towards the middle east in view of the continuing problems facing the Kurdish and Palestinian peoples? Will he ask the Government to reconsider their policy towards non-recognition of the right of Kurdish people to self-determination? Many people believe that peace in the region can come only when the rights of people such as the Kurds are recognised. That will be the key to a long-term and just peace in the region.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure when it might be possible to have a full-day's debate on that subject. As I have said, the Government are keen to keep the House fully informed about developments. I will bear in mind not the hon. Gentleman's point about the particular policy proposals, but his point about the possibility of a debate.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): May I return my right hon. Friend to the question about European debate and the intergovernmental conferences? Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the saloon bar of almost every pub in my constituency, and at Eton college debating society and in Lady Antonia Fraser's drawing room, those matters are discussed daily with anxiety? Why is it uniquely that this House, which is and should be the authority to allow the Executive to proceed with those negotiations, is not permitted to address those matters that are fundamental to the constitution of this country?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not familiar with the discussions that take place in all the areas to which my hon. Friend has referred. However, I am aware that those matters are frequently discussed within the precincts of the House and there are opportunities to question my right hon. Friends.

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs will shortly do that in a session with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that in his excellent interview titled "The Challenge of Conjuring" in this week's *House Magazine* he states:

"My first love really is mind-reading."

In those circumstances, did he know that I was going to ask him for a debate about American pitbull terriers and the serious problem whether fighting dogs of that kind should, as the *Leicester Mercury* so rightly demands, be banned because of the danger that they cause, as revealed in the disastrous injuries caused to a man who is at present being treated in the Leicester royal infirmary?

Mr. MacGregor: It did not require much mind-reading to know that the hon. and learned Gentleman was going to quote the *Leicester Mercury*. As he is aware, legislation is already in place to put down any dog that is dangerous. Furthermore, any owner who fails to take action about a dangerous dog can be banned from keeping a dog in future. Because the Government recognise that there may be a need to extend the law further, we issued a consultation paper last year entitled "The Control of Dogs" which contained several specific proposals. We have received a diverse range of views in response to that. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will announce his proposals this summer.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I remind my right hon. Friend of the statement made in the House a few weeks ago by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on the civil air transport regulations? Since then, they have had a considerable impact and there are also major policy implications and employment considerations. If my right hon. Friend cannot allow a full-day's debate in Government time, can he at least allow a half-day's debate on civil air transport policy?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think I can add to what I said earlier. Half days are in quite short supply in some respects as well. There are quite a large number of matters that hon. Members want to raise in the House. As I said earlier, I will bear in mind the point that my hon. Friend raised.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Given the right hon. Gentleman's welcome comment that he will consider the reform of the working processes of this place, what consideration will he give to the decentralisation of decision making, particularly against the background in which support for the independence of Scotland is rising, and even one third of the tattered remnants of his own party want constitutional change? Will he seriously take that matter on board?

Mr. MacGregor: I was in Perth last night discussing some of those matters with a lot of my friends in the party in Scotland. On my way back this morning, I noticed a headline in *The Scotsman* suggesting that there was some change in attitudes to such matters as a result of a recent poll.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): In order to make next week's debates totally useful, will my right hon. Friend use his best endeavours to persuade the Opposition to give some figures for their policies and tell the House and the country whether extra taxation would be needed to pay for them? My right hon. Friend will agree that it is dishonest for the Opposition constantly to hold out promises without giving any figures and that, without such details, our time in such debates would be wasted.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and I hope that that will be clear in next week's debates on the national health service. It is clear to me from what the Leader of the Opposition said last night that he does not understand what has been taking place in the health service in recent years and does not understand public spending. It is quite clear that the very substantial increase—over 53 per cent. in real terms—which we have achieved in NHS spending has arisen partly as a result of the priority that we have given it and partly as a result of economic growth. He could not do better—he would do worse.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Since the Leader of the House is so good at mind reading, does he know the question that I am about to ask him? He is obviously not as good as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) thinks he is.

As a member of the Procedure Committee, I was encouraged by the Government's response to the Committee's report on the workings of the Select Committee system. When will the necessary changes in the Standing Orders come forward? Will we have a debate? Since it appears that the Government are running out of business—business has collapsed on the past two evenings—could we discuss some of the outstanding Procedure Committee reports, in particular the Joint Committee report on the workings of the private Bill system? That matter also needs to be sorted out, and we now have the time to do it.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about running out of business. The two days to which he refers were the two days that were given to the Committee stage of the Finance Bill. In a number of previous years we have given three days, and we have sometimes been accused of not giving enough. This year there have been two days. As the hon. Gentleman will know, it is largely up to the Opposition how those two days are deployed. I was giving the House the normal amount of time. It is largely for the Opposition how that time is used. It is not a matter of the Government running out of business. I would have been much criticised if I had given less time to the Finance Bill on the Floor of the House.

On the Select Committee on Procedure, I confirm that I hope to be able to lay the orders fairly soon. That would be the appropriate time to have a debate on them. That is the proper way to proceed. I am very keen to do so because it is a very good report. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we accepted a large part of it and I am anxious to see it implemented.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House please arrange for an urgent, early debate on the workings of the grant-maintained schools provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988? That would enable the House to demonstrate to the people of this country the Labour party's commitment to abolish not only grant-maintained schools but grammar schools, city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme, Church schools and independent secondary schools, and to reduce

[Mr. Bob Dunn]

everything to the single common denominator of 11-to-16 comprehensive schools and tertiary colleges, thereby creating no choice whatsoever for the people of this country.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree 100 per cent. with my hon. Friend. He puts his points extremely well. I am happy to tell him that some of the points, at least in relation to grant-maintained schools, may be raised next week, because we shall debate regulations next Wednesday.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Is it not time to have a debate on the report of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, bearing in mind that the Scottish constitutional question managed to reach the agenda of even the Scottish Tory party conference in Perth this week, and the fact that the opinion polls in today's *Scotsman* reveal that the overwhelming majority of Scots, including almost half all Scottish Tory voters, are in favour of some form of Scottish Parliament?

Mr. MacGregor: We had some extremely good debates yesterday in Perth. The hon. Gentleman knows that the issue of the Scottish Convention was not put forward by the Government. He also knows that there are other ways of raising in the House matters on which the Government cannot find time for a debate, including all the Supply days that are available to the Opposition.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): While we are on the subject of constitutional issues, may we have a debate about the role and position of the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, given that his job security is more dependent on the well-being, prestige and the length of the membership rolls of the Confederation of Health Service Employees and of the National Union of Public Employees than on the effectiveness, efficiency and caring ability of the national health service? If we were to have that debate good and early, before the debate next week on the health service, might that be illuminating and set out some of the ground rules?

Mr. MacGregor: It would be in order for my hon. Friend to raise those matters in next week's debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): If the Government are so confident of their case on taxation and benefits, why can we not have a debate on that as early as possible, in which we shall be able to show that a large majority of the people of this country are now paying more in taxation—in both direct and indirect taxation—*[Interruption.]* The Leader of the House is asking for information about the local election results, but he will not get any satisfaction in relation to my seat. Although the large majority of people are now paying more in both indirect and direct taxation, the fact remains that the richest 1 per cent. of the population are now paying £30,000 less per year than 12 years ago. Does not that show the unfairness of Tory policies? If the Government really want a debate on such subjects, we shall be only too pleased to have one as quickly as possible.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman wrongly read either my mind or my lips. I was trying to find out whether he was present for our debates on the Finance Bill, where the issues——

Mr. Winnick: I was not.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman says that he was not here for our debates on the Finance Bill——

Mr. Winnick: I was attending the British-Irish parliamentary body.

Mr. MacGregor: Well, that cannot have been running through both the Second Reading and Committee stages of the Finance Bill. The plain fact is that we have recently had three days in which all those issues could have been fully raised if the hon. Gentleman had wished, so I do not intend to find another day. However, his point about higher-rate taxpayers entirely misses the point, which is that, as a result of our changes in higher rate taxation, the yield from higher income earners is now very much greater than under the Labour Government. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that his own party should go back to the disastrous tax regime of Labour's period in government.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware of Warwickshire's difficult position because of the reductions in revenue support grant and because of being community charge-capped? Is he further aware of the damage that is likely to be done to education in the county of Warwickshire as a result of the reductions in funding for schools? Will he therefore allow us an early debate on this matter next week?

Mr. MacGregor: Not next week, but I shall find time fairly soon for the general issue of capping to be raised.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Did the Leader of the House see the article that stated that he was going to make an announcement that the House would rise on 15 July until 22 October? In view of all the representations that have been made today for debates on Bangladesh, and on unemployment and all the rest, will he ensure that we do not get those suggested extra weeks so that we can have all those debates? We could have a debate on the Common Market and another vote on the Single European Act so that all those Tory Members who now have misgivings about the Common Market could join those Opposition Members who voted against the Single European Act and tell the Common Market to get lost.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, not for the first time I disagree entirely with his stance on European issues as well as on many others. Of course, those issues can be debated in June when I hope we shall have a full day's debate on developments in the European Community. We all get used to seeing speculative stories in the newspapers about the rising of the House. I simply do not know where that one came from as I have made no announcement.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the debate on the Government's public expenditure plans for 1991-92 to be held next Wednesday? Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), my right hon. Friend said that it would give us the opportunity to compare and contrast the Government's plans with those of the Opposition. However, for us to make that comparison, is it not necessary for us to have the Opposition's public expenditure plans on public display for every Member of Parliament and everyone outside this

place? We can have no constructive debate on Wednesday unless the Opposition publish their proposals which so far they will not do. What is the point of the debate?

Mr. MacGregor: The debate on Wednesday is about our public expenditure plans which are real, financable at present levels of taxation, and I believe have absolutely the right set of priorities. As my hon. Friend knows, there have been real and significant increases in expenditure. The debate on Wednesday is about ours, but I see no reason whatsoever why my hon. Friend should not raise the points he has made then. Certainly we shall continue doing so time and again in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week from the Home Secretary in regard to early-day motion 691 which concerns the importation of powerful and potentially dangerous and brutal dogs?

[That this House draws attention to the proposal to import a second Japanese Tosa dog for breeding purposes; notes that this species of dog grows to 17 stone and was originally bred for fighting; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to propose amendments to the law so that the import of new breeds of dog may be prohibited if it is against the public interest by virtue of the size, nature and purpose of the animal and so that, where appropriate, even where dogs are imported conditions may be attached to import licences as to the custody and breeding of such animals.]

Does he realise that the Department of the Environment already has powers passed by the House to introduce a dog registration scheme which will enable those potentially brutal and vicious dogs to be registered and traced and the owners to be given guidance and advice and any potential visitors warned about the dangers? The Bradford *Telegraph and Argus* and the *Yorkshire Post* have carried a number of stories—*[Laughter.]* Although hon. Members may find this amusing, some people have been savagely attacked by dogs such as American pitbull terriers, alsatians and doberman pinschers which have been allowed to roam loose. It really is time that the Government did something about it. They have the appropriate powers and we should not be waiting for vague statements from the Home Secretary at some vague future date.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think anyone was finding the subject of the hon. Gentleman's remarks amusing. It was simply because a smile flitted across his face when he mentioned the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus* that others responded in like fashion. I am sure that he will accept that we all take the matter extremely seriously. As I have already said, there is legislation to put down any dangerous dog. We have received a wide range of comments on the consultation paper and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will wish to make a statement as soon as he can.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Wednesday's debate on the Government's public expenditure plans will provide the Government with an opportunity to confirm that they will continue to fund spending on defence at a level which enables us to deal with an uncertain and unstable world and that they have no intention of following the Labour party's plans to slash defence expenditure by £9,000 million a year?

Mr. MacGregor: One of the documents to which I referred in my announcement about business relates to our defence expenditure plans which are clearly set out. I have no doubt that they will be referred to in Wednesday's debate.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): When is the Scottish Grand Committee likely to resume its sittings? I hope that we can have an early debate either through that forum or on the Floor of the House about Scottish fish farming. The problems affecting that industry are being exacerbated by Norwegian dumping on the European Community which will be made worse if the reports that the United States will impose a levy on Norwegian farmed fish are true. My fish farming constituents believe that the Government do not know what they are doing or how to tackle the problem and I should welcome a debate on the matter.

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the issues facing the fish farming industry, in which, as the hon. Lady may know, I have taken and will continue to take a close interest. Indeed, I was discussing some of those matters in Perth last night.

Mrs. Michie: In Perth?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes. I do not know why the hon. Lady is so surprised—it seems to me to be an appropriate place to discuss such matters, with people who are experts in them. As regards how the matter is raised in the House, the hon. Lady will have ways to raise it, but, if she will allow me, I shall look into the matter and reflect on it.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): In view of the amount of public disquiet expressed in the media and in all the pubs in my constituency about the level of public support given to people who borrow inordinately large amounts of money on mortgage and cannot repay them, may we have an early debate in this House on the subject, not because we object to helping such people, but because my constituents feel that the burden of those bad judgments in overlending should be borne equally by the lenders of those very large sums?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend may be referring to a specific case that has received much publicity. The rules on help with mortgage interest are applied even-handedly to all owner-occupiers who suddenly become unemployed. In that case I think that there was some reference to a second home. No help is given with outgoings on a second home, and the possession of a second property will preclude entitlement to income support if its value, less any debts secured on it, exceeds £8,000. My hon. Friend may wish to know that the chief adjudication officer is taking legal advice on some aspects of the commissioner's decision to allow full payment of mortgage interest in one recent case.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Is the Leader of the House aware of the great concern in colleges of education in Scotland about the Secretary of State's proposal, in his poll tax announcement, to take them out of the ambit of local government? Today, I received a letter from the principal of Coatbridge college—he is also secretary of the Strathclyde Principals Association—and from the chairman of the council at Coatbridge college expressing grave anxieties about administrative and other difficulties that would arise. Since that college serves Lanarkshire, including the village of Shotts which I gather

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

is dear to the right hon. Gentleman's heart, will he agree that those well-informed views on education should not be dismissed lightly?

Mr. MacGregor: I hesitate to say this, but I referred to Shotts in Perth last night as well—it was obviously a long night. When I was Secretary of State for Education and Science I was certainly enthusiastic to work towards what we have announced—further education colleges coming outside local authority control in England. I know that that has been widely welcomed by many colleges in England and it is a desirable policy development. As regards the administrative problems of a college in Scotland that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, I shall draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I impress on the Leader of the House the need for an early debate either in the Chamber or in the Scottish Grand Committee on the worrying subject of the present circumstances of child care law in Scotland, especially when we compare the present state of the law with English legislation? The right hon. Gentleman well knows that there was a time when Scots law was well in advance of English law in the protection of children. I refer to the Social Work (Scotland) Act, 1968. Today, children in Scotland are discriminated against, compared with the protection that is given, rightly and properly, to children here in England. There is no Children (Scotland) Act similar to match that in England. Under the provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill, children caught up in sexual and child abuse cases in England will rightly be spared the ordeal of giving evidence in court but a few feet away from the accused. We do not have that type of legislation in Scotland. We ought to have it and we need that debate.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is not possible for me to comment on a particular child abuse case in Scotland which is sub judice, but my right hon. Friend has announced that when that matter is completed, there will be an inquiry into this whole area. I am not sure that it would be appropriate to find Government time for a debate on the matter in the near future. It is important that the inquiry should take place. The hon. Gentleman will be able to raise issues that concern him—and I fully agree with him that these are important matters—in other ways in the House.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): When might we have an opportunity to debate the proposed European extradition treaty—or does that come in the general van of the House not knowing until things are finished—so that hon. Members might express their views on the Republic of Ireland constantly seeking favoured-nation status with us while being unwilling to sign a treaty of extradition, when this nation suffers most because of that failure?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made clear the Government's position on those matters. I cannot promise a debate on them in the near future.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): The Government are not even handed about certain matters. As a Scot, the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that north of the border a different law operates on the poll tax, which is how the struggle started. Nobody can be gaoled there, although in England 16 people have been hounded and imprisoned by the Government under the laws of England. We need a debate to see whether we can be more even handed on the issue. It seems clear that there should be an amnesty. Can we discuss the matter next week? It is important that we do that, because the people outside are demanding it, and they are the people who matter. People power matters.

Mr. MacGregor: The people outside, as the hon. Gentleman puts it, in England—I am sure that the same applies in Scotland—feel strongly when they pay their community charge and find that others, sometimes on higher incomes than themselves, do not. There is very strong feeling indeed in the country about that. People feel that those who do not make their payments should be properly pursued in the normal way.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will the Leader of the House allocate time for a debate on the practice of the HFC bank in selling insurance-linked loans? Revelations in the *Daily Mirror* have recently shown how many people have been misled in a cold and calculating way. One couple who had a loan of £5,000 were misled into taking out an insurance policy and now have a loan of £14,000. They are not alone in that experience. People who have worked for the bank have complained. It is essential that we debate the matter so that the Minister has an opportunity to explain what will be done by the regulatory bodies about such scandals.

Mr. MacGregor: I did not see the newspaper report to which the hon. Member referred, so I cannot comment on it. I cannot find Government time for those matters to be discussed in the near future, but there are other ways in which they can be raised in the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Regarding Tuesday's business, since fortunately, but deservedly, I have the Adjournment debate on the subject of the Kuwaiti oilfields, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman to say who will answer my debate? Will it be the Foreign Office, which must conduct relations with paralysed Kuwait; will it be the Department of the Environment, in view of the fact that the effects now stretch to the Himalayas, west China, Quetta and Baluchistan; will it be the Department of Energy, with its oil well responsibilities; will it be the Department of Trade and Industry, which is responsible for contracts; or will it be the Ministry of Defence, whose sappers are trying their best in the most difficult conditions to fight the oilwell fires? Whoever answers, will the Leader of the House arrange for a formal statement to be forthcoming from the chief medical officer, Sir Donald Acheson, giving the Government's views on the carcinogenic or other effects of what is happening to those who are trying to put out the dreadful fires?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should not go into the subject of his Adjournment debate. He may ask which Minister will reply.

Mr. Dalyell: Can I not use this opportunity to ask for a formal statement of the Government's view? If not, the issue will be evaded.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is about business next week. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was asking who will answer the debate.

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, but perhaps we could have a statement from the Department that will not be answering it—the Department of Health—because part of the debate is a serious statement on the considered, non-political, governmental view of the medical authorities on the cancer risks that our people, as well as the indigenous populations, face in an increasingly appalling situation.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not yet sure who will answer the hon. Gentleman's Adjournment debate. It will not be all five Departments, but I shall let him know which one it is as soon as I can find out. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his usual courtesy in indicating the subject that he will raise and I shall draw it to the attention of the Minister who will reply.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Leader of the House allow time next week to discuss a serious matter that has arisen because of the policy directive that Yorkshire regional health authority has issued to GPs? It has told GPs that if they refer patients to a hospital that is not contracted to the local health authority there could be delays in that patient's treatment, but that if a patient is referred from a funded practice there will be no delay. It is a two-tier system and, until someone decides who will pay the cash for the patient who will be under the practice contracted by the health authority, there will be tremendous problems. Will the Leader of the House allow time for this two-tier system in the health service to be discussed so that we can resolve the matter?

Mr. MacGregor: We do not have a two-tier system and the matter can be raised if the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, in the debate on Tuesday.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Does the Leader of the House agree that there is now an urgent need for a debate on the defence industry in general and the aerospace industry in particular? The huge number of redundancies that have already been announced this year were disgracefully augmented yesterday by the axing of 3,000 jobs by Rolls-Royce, not least in Leavesden. If the Leader of the House could find time to organise such a debate, it would allow a contrast to be made between the chaotic way in which defence jobs are being run down—often losing highly skilled men and women who have worked for the same company for 20, 30 or 40 years—and the need for those companies to diversify into socially useful products. If the companies will not do it, why will not the Government offer some direction from the Ministry of Defence or the Department of Trade and Industry? If they will not do so in the private sector, the industry should be brought back into the public sector so that the jobs of those skilled defence workers can be guaranteed.

Mr. MacGregor: This is the first time that I have heard the hon. Gentleman argue for higher defence expenditure. He has always moved in a different way.

Mr. Nellist: I was talking about diversification.

Mr. MacGregor: I know, but the hon. Gentleman was also complaining about the loss of jobs because of the lack of defence expenditure. He tries to have it both ways. As he knows, we have debates on defence matters. There will be two more in this Session and the defence aspects could be raised then.

Points of Order

4.23 pm

Mr. Speaker: A point of order, I think—Mr. Howarth.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for reading my mind.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It did not take long.

Mr. Howarth: I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that I and other Conservative Members have waited patiently for 53 minutes to raise our points of order. We did not seek to press you at the beginning of business questions because I understand that, during Agriculture questions, the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) raised a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me just clear that up, because the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) blew his top about it. It is perfectly legitimate for an hon. Member who disagrees with the answer to his question to say that he will seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment if the question on the Order Paper is his own. That is exactly what happened. I stopped another hon. Member, who said that he would raise the matter on the Adjournment because his point of order was on a supplementary question, which is quite a different matter.

Mr. Howarth: I am most grateful that the precedent has been set that points of order may be raised now.

As I think that you, Mr. Speaker, will anticipate, my point of order relates to the disgraceful behaviour that occurred yesterday afternoon during the Division on the Asylum Seekers and Refugees Bill—a ten-minute Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). I do not know whether you have had a chance to read the exchanges, which are recorded in *Hansard*, in columns 749 and 750.

I was telling for the Ayes, and the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, (Mr. Nellist), who is in his place, was behaving in the customary menacing and contemptible manner which he frequently displays in the House. It is clear that, yesterday afternoon, some of my hon. Friends might have voted against the measure had it not been for the menacing and thuggish remarks of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, whose complete lack of a sense of humour is well known to the House. He was behaving in a thoroughly intimidating fashion.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order for me, though?

Mr. Howarth: The point of order for you, Mr. Speaker, is that Mr. Deputy Speaker, while deprecating what took place, took no effective action——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with this. I have received a report of the incident, and I wholly support what Mr. Deputy Speaker said about this yesterday. He said that such conduct was strongly to be deprecated. He established that there had been no physical obstruction of hon. Members, and the Division was able to proceed without interruption. The Chair has no power to require the withdrawal of words spoken outside the Chamber, and furthermore nothing that occurs on one day may be dealt with by the Chair under disciplinary powers on a subsequent occasion.

Following Mr. Deputy Speaker's strong condemnation of yesterday's incident, I hope that the matter can rest there. I do, however, absolutely deprecate language and words of the sort used yesterday, which would have been dealt with strongly if they had been made in the Chamber.

Mr. Howarth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for what you have said, but the point about the behaviour of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East relates not so much to what he said —which was his usual fatuous nonsense—but the manner in which he said it. The Serjeant at Arms is present, armed with his sword, to deal with thugs and villains like that.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that swords are called for. I call the Father of the House.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I rise with some reluctance because I do not like criticising any hon. Member, from whichever party.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) has raised a point of great substance—yesterday, an attempt was made to ventilate it. I understand perfectly, and entirely agree with you, Mr. Speaker, that no criticism can be made of the Chair. Mr. Deputy Speaker, by virtue of being locked in the Chair, cannot be cognisant of what happens outside the Chamber, and I could not quarrel with one word that he said. However, the fact remains that that little area between the doors——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): There was nothing as vicious as during the abortion law debates which the right hon. Gentleman led.

Sir Bernard Braine: My point is of far greater importance than anything that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has raised, either today or any other day—it goes to the heart of the liberties and rights of the House.

That little area and the two Division Lobbies are an integral part of the decision-making process for which the House exists. What happened yesterday was disgraceful.

I do not wish to repeat in detail what I said yesterday, but in my 40 years in the House I have never witnessed any behaviour like it. The behaviour of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) was intimidating and offensive. He barred the way to certain hon. Members who were trying to get into the Lobby. Indeed, it alarmed some hon. Members, who turned away. If such behaviour had taken place in the Chamber, it would have resulted in Mr. Deputy Speaker disciplining the hon. Member straight away.

This is a serious problem. Mr. Deputy Speaker could not be cognisant of what had happened. I am supporting my hon. Friend because abuse of privilege outside the House is rightly taken seriously by all hon. Members. But abuse of the voting procedure of the House is far worse. Behaviour of that kind cannot be tolerated.

I shall not pursue the matter further now, but I hope that you will consider it, Mr. Speaker, and see what

restraints can be put upon such behaviour, either by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East or by any other hon. Member.

Several Hon. Members: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very busy day ahead of us. May I say to the Father of the House and to the whole House that I entirely accept what he said; such behaviour is unacceptable. The Deputy Speaker who was in the Chair at the time sent to find out if there had been obstruction, and it was reported to him that there was no obstruction. Therefore, there was nothing that he could do about a matter that had taken place outside the Chamber. In order to clear the matter up, the hon. Member who was concerned is present in the Chamber, and if he would like to give an explanation, we could get on with the next business.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was present. Let us hear what he has to say about it.

Mr. Skinner: And I was present on the previous day when there was a vote on a ten-minute Bill, and I heard someone shouting, "Vote this way for porn videos." It was not exactly that. I have been around many times when I have seen Tory Whips shoving hon. Members into the Lobby to vote when they have not wanted to. What happened yesterday was that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) saw some Tory Members who were goose-stepping on their way into the Lobby. He thought that he would make a few apposite remarks because they were anxious to vote against the measure. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) has been referred to many times in the House as a Member of the goose-stepping tendency—and saying that is not prevented by "Erskine May".

The truth is, as you know, Mr. Speaker, that on many occasions there has been a little bother beyond that line. I remember, as I am sure you do, when Tom Swain got hold of the neck of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Some people asked, "What is going on?" *Hansard* could only say that it was an altercation. He nearly throttled him. Someone said, "Somebody had better stop him." The deputy Chief Whip at the time, who is not a million miles away from the Chair, had to go and sort them out. But it did not get in *Hansard*, and I did not hear any Tory Members raising a fuss about it. The right hon. Member for Chingford had to send a letter of apology to my hon. Friend.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman reminds me of things that I have witnessed in the Division Lobbies. I am bound to say that I have heard some rough things said in the Division Lobbies. Let us leave it now. The whole House knows that we should behave with decorum. Comments made outside the Chamber, which are clearly designed to raise the temperature, which, I have to say bluntly to the hon. Member, are offensive, and which would be dealt with strongly if said inside the Chamber, are to be deprecated. I think that we should move on.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on another matter. I am sure that you will have seen a number of reports in the *Today* newspaper this week that are causing concern to hon. Members. You have always sought to protect the reputation of the House.

In one article on Tuesday *Today* said:

"the evidence confirms that Britain's MPs are the laziest in Europe."

It goes on to say:

"Britain's lazy MPs are to award themselves a Summer holiday which could last up to four months."

You know that that is not true, Mr. Speaker. We do not award ourselves holidays; we have a recess, and during it some of us manage to eke out perhaps one or two weeks' holiday, but the great majority of hon. Members are hard at work in their constituencies.

More importantly, the editorial in *Today* states:

"Televising parliament allows us to see that apart from Prime Minister's question time, the chamber is usually at least nine tenths empty. Do the Hon. Members honestly expect us to believe the rest of them are all working away busily?"

No reference is made to Select Committees or Standing Committees, both of which are heavily attended by Members and deal with legislation. No reference is made to Back-Bench groups, the meetings of which are heavily attended. Nor does the newspaper refer to policy meetings of all the parties in the House or to meetings with Ministers, constituents and other Members. We are within an hour and a half of a meeting, which will be well attended, with a delegation of Commonwealth parliamentarians who are in the House. The record must be set straight, and the British people should be given some indication from the Chair about what is happening.

Under a headline which asks:

"So just how hard does your M P work for you?",

there is a list of more than 600 Members and their voting records. It is significant that, at the bottom of the list, is a Scottish Member who has had a lung transplant. A little further up the list is the name of a Liverpool Member who is deeply ill, an illness that is of concern to many hon. Members. Further up the list there is a reference to Mr. Norman Buchan, who was a close friend of many hon. Members and who died quite a long time ago. Somehow his name is included in the list in the context of his voting effort, but clearly he was not in a position to vote in the House.

The bottom of the list refers to Ministers, who are often in different parts of the country carrying out their public duties, and to Front-Bench members of my party, who can be in all parts of the country carrying out engagements. The first 100 names contain a heavy concentration of Conservative Members but, of course, we all know—there is nothing wrong about it—that the Government have to maintain a majority in the House and Conservative Members are detained here.

That list is supposed to be an indication of the effort made by hon. Members in carrying out their public duties. The article is clearly a disgrace. It is a misrepresentation of what happens in Parliament. Although Mr. John Craig is a good friend to many hon. Members, if pressure was exerted upon him by his editors to write the article, he should at least protest and perhaps indicate his protest to Parliament as a whole. Let us express the hope, as I do on behalf of my hon. Friends, that *Today* will be wise enough to print an apology for this gross misrepresentation of the democratic process in the United Kingdom.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) to make his point of order at some length, because it is important that the truth about Members of Parliament and their work load in this place should be known to the public. This country has a free press and there is no way in which any of us would seek to muzzle it. As the guardian of the reputation of the House of Commons and its Members, I deprecate what has been said. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), who is present in the Chamber——

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Do not get up yet, please.

In a debate which I well remember about a year ago, the hon. Gentleman said, if I may paraphrase him, that one could sum up some of the modern press in three short phrases—"Make it brief, make it juicy, make it up."

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not have the advantage of having the article in question to hand, but I did read it carefully yesterday, and I should like to endorse everything that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has said. The article was run under a headline that suggested that we have voted ourselves a four-month break during the summer, and it went on to question the work load of hon. Members. Perhaps we should be interested in the work load of members of the Press Gallery, but that might be mischievous. Just because this House does not sit in the summer months does not mean that our duties end there. I have no doubt that the person who wrote the article would be the first when in trouble to get in touch with his Member of Parliament—if necessary at midnight on Christmas day—to solve his problem.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you agree that the House of Commons should not be immune from criticism, and that journalists have as much right as anyone else to criticise us? It would be most unfortunate if we ever did anything to stop people criticising us. But is there not an important distinction between informed and uninformed criticism? I am sure that we all disapprove of the sort of trashy criticism that brings the House into disrepute.

Tabloid newspapers are read by a large number of people, and if some people look on the House of Commons with contempt as a result—I hope that they do not—does not that undermine our democratic liberties? This House is the custodian of the democratic liberties of our people, and to the extent that it is brought into disrepute by valueless criticism of this sort, that is unfortunate, to say the least.

It might be useful if we compared the working hours of most Members of Parliament with the working hours of the journalists who have written some of this trashy criticism.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Further to that point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir.

The right point to emphasise is the use of information. When an article clearly contains glaring errors and insulting remarks, as described by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), it should be exposed in public, but we should be careful about trying to remove from newspapers their right to be wrong. It is important that we have a free press and that, when newspapers are wrong, people should be able to raise the matter.

That should be the end of it, except for one suggestion that may be outside the rules of the House. Perhaps one of the cameras could be turned for one minute every hour on the Press Gallery, and the resulting photographs printed and made available to Members of Parliament and to the editors in charge of those who report our proceedings.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Dr. Godman: Yes, Sir. I am grateful for your response to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). Do you agree that, at the very least, the editor of the relevant newspaper should send his profuse apologise to Mrs. Janey Buchan, the widow of our late and dear friend, Norman Buchan?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not defend the inaccuracies in the article, but you may recall that, at one time, the attendance and voting records of Members were published every year in an independent publication, which gave a much better idea of our work load because it covered oral and written questions tabled by Members as well. Do you agree that, although we can criticise inaccuracies, a number of Members of this House do not exactly shed lustre on our proceedings when we are criticised in respect of attendance by holding so many outside interests, many of which they acquired when they came here——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is widening the point of order; we do not want to debate that now.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Ron Brown *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have mentioned the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith, but I call Mr. Marlow first.

Mr. Marlow: I do not think that we should be over-sensitive or over-precious about this. One of the roles of this House is to seek to sustain the interests of the people of this country, and from time to time we have to take on vested interests and lobbies. So it is not very pleasant if we are seen as being lobbyists on our own behalf, as we seem to be at the moment.

It is certainly true that many hon. Members work as hard and are as dedicated as anyone in the country, but that is not true of everyone in the House. It is fair and proper that the press should criticise. Sometimes that criticism is not as impartial as we should like it to be, but the press is free, and long may it remain so. Let us not be too precious about it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Finally, Mr. Ron Brown.

Mr. Ron Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Your paraphrasing of my statement showed what all of us feel—that the press should not make up a story.

We are of course open to criticism. It annoys me, however, that a certain tabloid, the *Daily Record* and the Edinburgh *Evening News*, recently made up a story that I had forged signatures on an early-day motion. That goes on all the time, even though no such criticisms about me or anyone else have come to your notice. Have I to your knowledge, Mr. Speaker, forged signatures on early-day motions about any issue, sensational or otherwise?

Mr. Speaker: I am certain that that is quite untrue.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take one question from Northern Ireland since we have not yet had a comment from there; then we must move on.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate being called, Mr. Speaker, although I was trying to catch your eye before this matter was raised, but what I have to say is linked with the earlier issue.

I support those who defend the right of the press to be free, but the press should give the whole facts. For example, some of us have abstained in person in votes because we were not prepared to vote for or against some motion, so the voting record has distorted what goes on here.

I regret that the Leader of the House is no longer present but I seek guidance from you, Mr. Speaker, following the right hon. Gentleman's response to my question about the extradition treaty in Europe. He said that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would explain the Government's position to us. I was actually asking for a statement in the House so that the House would be given responsibility. We learned about this from the *Daily Mail* yesterday—that is why I said that this was an associated matter; sometimes the media inform us about things that Ministers do not tell us about in the House—and I am not aware that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for dealing with extradition in Europe. The Minister responsible should come to the House so that we can debate the matter with informed minds.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that those on the Government Front Bench will have heard that.

I have allowed this matter to go on for some time because it is important that the public know the facts about the House of Commons—the fact that Standing Committees meet at 10.30 in the morning, so we do not sit only in the afternoons; the fact that there are Select Committees, so that the work of Members of Parliament does not go on only in the Chamber; and there is constituency work as well.

We all agree that we must have a free press in this country; we also want a responsible press. What has upset a number of parliamentary colleagues today is the fact that some hon. Members, for reasons that they could not help —in one case, a death and in others, illness—were mentioned adversely in a newspaper report. That draws attention to the fact that journalists should do their homework just as we do.

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Act 1991
Representation of the People Act 1991
Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1991
Tay Road Bridge Order Confirmation Act 1991
Shard Bridge Act 1991
Adelphi Estate Act 1991
Heathrow Express Railway Act 1991.

Act passed in accordance with the provisions of the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949: War Crimes Act 1991.

Orders of the Day

Social Security (Contributions) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.49 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to fill what I believe to be an important gap in the national insurance contributions system as a result of which employers do not pay contributions to the national insurance fund if they pay their employees in cars rather than in cash. As hon. Members will know, the fund is used to finance a wide range of contributory benefits, including retirement pensions and widows' benefits. Its income is generated by levying contributions on employees and their employers and on the self-employed. Under the present law, employers are required to pay contributions on the earnings of all their employees if they are above the lower limit, but earnings are defined in such a way as to exclude payments in kind. This exclusion dates from a time when such payments represented only a very small proportion of people's earnings.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend, very interestingly, has indicated that the national insurance fund is a specific bucket of money to be spent in various areas of Government policy. We are aware of proposals that employees' contributions should go right up the range. If that were to happen, would not national insurance become exactly the same as income tax? It is suggested, in addition, that some people should have to pay 10 per cent. extra in income tax. That, together with the payment of 9 per cent. right up the range, would mean that the managers of the country would be faced with a marginal tax rate increase of about 50 per cent. In those circumstances, as night follows day, every handbag and wallet in the country would be mugged by people seeking this extra money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am sure the Minister recognises that this is a comparatively narrow Bill and that we cannot debate the whole range of things that have just been raised.

Mr. Scott: I certainly accept your judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not, in any case, have responded in detail to my hon. Friend, although I understand his impatience and his inclination to draw attention to some of the nonsense being suggested by the Opposition in the run-up to the election. In due course, there will be opportunities to tackle these matters.

The situation that the Bill seeks to address dates from a time when payments in kind of this sort represented only a very small proportion of people's earnings. They were generally made on an irregular and infrequent basis and often consisted of goods that were difficult, if not impossible, to value accurately. The situation today is very different. A large number of employers choose to offer their employees a total package of remuneration, which includes substantial non-cash items.

The commonest and largest such item is the company car. One has only to look at the advertisements in the appointments sections of the national newspapers to see how common that is these days. We estimate that, this year, more than 2 million employees will receive, as part of the remuneration package, the benefit of having a company car. This represents a doubling of the number of company cars since 1985-86. Company cars have become a normal and accepted part of people's earnings. I cannot believe, in those circumstances, that it is right that this form of payment should lie outside the national insurance system. Perhaps I may advance an additional, tangential argument by saying that nor can it be right, given the impact of motoring on the environment, that there should, in a sense, be a built-in encouragement for people to be paid in terms of cars rather than cash.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): My right hon. Friend said that one purpose of the national insurance fund is to make provision for such benefits as retirement pensions. If employers are now to pay national insurance contributions in respect of staff motor cars, will the employees get some additional state benefits by way of extra pension?

Mr. Scott: That is certainly not the case. There are certain demands on the national insurance fund. A certain percentage is guaranteed to the national health service. The fund also pays for other contributory benefits. Obviously we, as well as the Government Actuary, monitor the state of the fund, but there is no essential link between the benefits that are paid and the contributions that are received. From year to year, a judgment is made as to contributions and payments. There is no automaticity.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the number of cars provided by companies for the use of their employees. Does he agree that a vast number of those employees simply must have a company car? I think, for instance, of electricians, washing machine servicers and representatives of confectionery companies. If such a person has a car, it is not part of his remuneration package. The car is needed as a tool of the trade, just as a secretary needs a word processor or a telephone. Surely it is unrealistic to suggest that employers should be especially burdened in this way for providing their employees with the tools to do the job for which they are paid.

Mr. Scott: I shall respond briefly to my hon. Friend, but will give more detail later in my speech. There is a range of provision for company cars. Some cars are, in effect, a perk; some are essentially a tool of the trade, in the sense that they are necessary to the job; in the middle, there is a mixture of business and private use, which varies very considerably. I hope that later I shall be able to satisfy hon. Members that the changes that we are making reflect those different uses. If a motor vehicle of one sort or another is used entirely for business purposes it will be outside the scope of this legislation. My hon. Friend referred to such vehicles as being tools of the trade, but where a vehicle is used to a significant extent for private purposes, a halved-scale rate payment will be expected to comply with these provisions. Any vehicle that is used entirely for business purposes will not be covered.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will the Exchequer make such national insurance contributions in respect of the private use made of ministerial cars—for example, on journeys between home and place of work?

Mr. Scott: Ministerial cars, and, indeed, cars used by some other hon. and right hon. Members, are provided from a Government pool as required. They are not allocated to individuals.

Mr. Couchman: Ah!

Mr. Scott: Having been a Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend will know that there are very strict rules about the use to which ministerial vehicles may be put.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Another story for the *Today* newspaper.

Mr. Scott: They are no different from the rules applied by Governments of all parties since the war.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I thank the Minister for his characteristic courtesy in giving way.

Can he confirm that the implementation of this legislation will not result in an extra workload on the staff in Department of Social Security offices? In Greenock and Port Glasgow, there is great concern about the slowness with which local offices deal with claims—in particular, claims for backdated benefits. I assure the Minister that this matter concerns people in my constituency.

Mr. Scott: If I may turn the tables on the hon. Gentleman, I should say that I admire his characteristic ingenuity. There is a total distinction between the new Benefits Agency, which I expect to improve the delivery of services to the constituents of all hon. Members, and the Contributions Agency, which will be responsible for the collection of national insurance contributions. There again, my right hon. Friend and my colleagues in the Department expect to see improved performance in the collection of national insurance contributions from employers, the self-employed and so on in coming years. So there will certainly be no impact at all on the service, which we aim to improve, in the local offices of the Benefits Agency.

Returning to my main theme, I do not believe that it is right that the rules should continue to operate in such a way that employers find it financially more attractive to pay their employees with cars rather than with cash. The Bill that I am urging the House to support today aims to correct this imbalance in our present legislation by requiring employers to pay national insurance contributions on cars and free fuel.

Individual employees who are provided with company cars and fuel are at present required to pay income tax on the benefit which they derive from free private motoring. The value of this benefit is assessed using a set of scale charges devised by the Inland Revenue to reflect the costs of owning and running a motor vehicle. We propose that the same scale charge rules shall be used to determine an employer's contribution liability. As with the Inland Revenue scheme, employers will face no contribution payments if a company car is provided purely for business purposes and there is no private mileage. Similarly, there will be reductions in contribution liability where business mileage is high. I believe that to be right. It is a way of recognising, within this pattern of provision, that for some employees a car is essential to the performance of their duties, whereas for others—those who do very little business travel—the car is provided solely or largely for the employees' private use.

As the House will know, there is a liability on both employers and employees to pay class 1 contributions. Nevertheless, we have decided—I hope that I can carry the House with me on this—that employees will not be liable to pay contributions in respect of company cars and free fuel. They already pay tax on that use.

There is a variety of practical reasons why we have decided not to impose national insurance contributions on those people. First, more than half all employees who have a company car are above the upper earnings limit for contributions. Secondly, employees are already required to pay tax and the imbalance in the tax and contributions rules for them is not so manifest as it is for employers. Finally, the rules for assessing primary contributions make it very difficult to integrate the new system with the existing national insurance contribution arrangements so as to produce a workable system for collecting the new contributions from employees. We believe that the additional complications for employers would be out of all proportion to the extra revenue raised and we therefore intend that employees should be excluded from any new liability.

I turn now to the practical arrangements that we intend to make for the collection of the new contributions. In devising these arrangements we have paid careful attention to the need to produce a scheme which employers can operate with the minimum of extra work. We have therefore decided to stick very closely to existing Inland Revenue rules with which employers are already familiar. Accordingly, the Bill will impose a contribution liability in respect of those employees provided with cars only where a scale charge would apply for tax purposes. Broadly speaking, these are company directors and employees earning more than £8,500 a year, including benefits in kind. The substantial advantage of this approach is that employers are already required to report annually to the Inland Revenue the details of such cars and we see no reason why they should face any particular difficulty in combining that reporting process with the assessment of contribution liability under the terms of this Bill.

The annual reporting takes place at the end of each tax year and forms detailing the cars and petrol provided during the previous year have to be sent to the Inland Revenue by 19 June. Under our proposals employers will use the same information, together with guidance which my Department will provide, to assess their contribution liability. The sums due can then be paid to the Inland Revenue as part of the normal PAYE national insurance return. The only other task employers will have to undertake is the inclusion of the contributions paid, in the normal way, in their wages records and end-of-year documentation.

The Bill will enable us to make regulations to determine those arrangements. However, before drafting the regulations, laying them before the House and setting out the practical arrangements for collection, we have invited employers' representatives to comment on the scheme that we have in mind. We will listen very carefully to their views and take them into account before settling the final details. We have time to do that because, although the Bill

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introduces the new contributions from the beginning of the present tax year, they will not be assessed or collected until 1992-93—in essence, in June 1992.

I know that some employers have expressed to us and in the press, to some extent, concern about the need for additional record-keeping. I do not believe that such concern is well founded. As I have explained, details of company cars already have to be provided to the Inland Revenue each year. Only a small amount of additional information will be needed to calculate the appropriate contribution charge. If, for example, the employer intends to claim one of the discounts for high mileage, he will have to satisfy himself that the car was used for more than 2,500 or more than 18,000 business miles during the course of the year. I do not believe that that will represent an insuperable problem.

We believe that in the majority of cases the information will already be available from the employers' records. First, it will be generally clear from the nature of the employee's job whether a discount for business use over 2,500 or 18,000 miles a year is appropriate. Secondly, the employer will be able to check details of business mileage with his employees. Finally, since the employer will be meeting the costs of petrol used for business mileage and may be keeping records for VAT purposes, further information will be available. So I do not believe that this will put any substantial extra burden on employers. There will be no requirement to maintain comprehensive business mileage records in every case and, generally speaking, we shall be adopting precisely the same approach to this as the Inland Revenue does at the moment in assessing individual liability; and after consulting employers, we shall be providing them with detailed guidance about what information will be required to comply with the requirements of the system.

To ensure that the system is operated correctly, we shall not be giving discounts to employers who at the time that the contributions are due do not know, or cannot say, which business mileage band is appropriate. I believe that that is a sensible protection for the fund. Subsequent adjustments will be possible if the wrong, or insufficient, information was used in the first calculation. In the event of disputes, employers will have access to the existing departmental machinery which at present determines the outcome of contribution problems.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Is my right hon. Friend saying that any disputes should be settled by the Department of Social Security and not by the Inland Revenue? If the details have to go to the Inland Revenue, can he assure us that disputes will be dealt with by the excellent set-up in his Department?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend is, of course, very familiar with that system, and we will use exactly the same machinery as we use at the moment to settle contributions disputes.

In essence, we are looking to have here a system of self-assessment, with checks undertaken, in the normal way, by national insurance inspectors, who will obviously want to be sure that employers understand and operate the rules correctly.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Before my right hon. Friend continues, I want to ask him about the payments. Is not it the case that most national insurance contributions at the moment are collected monthly with PAYE? How much is collected after the end of the national insurance year at the moment, because, as I understand it, in June 1992, £550 million will be due in one lump sum from employers and there are no interest penalties for late payment? How will the Department ensure that the money is paid over on time?

Mr. Scott: Under the Inland Revenue scheme, the money has to be paid by 19 June following the end of the tax year. Those would be our arrangements for any money that had not been paid in the course of ordinary monthly payments. Anything outstanding would have to be paid by 19 June following the end of the tax year. We shall follow the existing arrangements closely. It must be for the convenience of employers that, in establishing the contribution rules, we follow the Inland Revenue as closely as possible. Employers who are familiar with what happens with the Inland Revenue can lock easily into our provisions for national insurance contributions.

I turn now to the individual provisions of the Bill. Clause 1 amends existing legislation and specifies the circumstances in which the new contributions are payable and who will be liable to pay them. It also defines the amount on which the contributions will be calculated and the percentage rate at which they will be charged.

Subsections (1) to (4) introduce the new contribution which is to be called "class 1A". The provisions of subsection (5) form the basis of how the contributions will be calculated and who should pay them. The value of employer-provided cars and fuel will be determined, as I explained earlier, by reference to the income tax rules given in sections 157 and 158 and in schedule 6 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

The liability for the new contribution will arise where an amount is chargeable under tax rules for the employment in question and where that employment is employment for which national insurance contributions would be due. The effect of that is to exclude from the new contributions any employee earning less than £8,500 a year, including benefits in kind. Having established the basis of the liability, subsection (5) then identifies the secondary contributor—generally the employer, but not exclusively so—as the person who pays the new contribution.

The Bill deals next with the amount on which the contribution is to be calculated. That is determined by using income tax rules on scale charges for cars and fuel. Subsection (5), therefore, provides for the appropriate discounts and premiums, as well as excluding any case in which the car is not made available for private use or in which fuel is available for business travel. Having established the cash equivalent of the benefit of a car or fuel in that way, the amount of the contribution is calculated at the percentage rate set for the main employers' rate, currently 10·4 per cent. Subsection (5) also makes provision for employers who, because they have insufficient information, are unable to determine the relevant cash equivalent of the benefit of the car or fuel. The Bill provides that, unless the employer has information to the contrary, the cash equivalent is set at the highest relevant level. That will ensure that the discounts for high business mileage are available only to employers who can show that the appropriate conditions are satisfied.

Further provision is made to allow for this part of the legislation to be amended by regulation following any alteration to the main provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. Any such alteration is most likely to be brought about by means of a Finance Act and the regulatory power in the Bill therefore avoids the need for additional primary legislation to follow any changes in a Finance Act. The power is limited to such amendment as is necessary or expedient.

Subsection (5) includes a regulation-making power to except persons from liability in prescribed circumstances or to reduce the class 1A contributions due. That power will be exercised only in very limited circumstances. Its purpose is to make special provision for the employers of those taxpayers who benefit from extra-statutory concessions currently made by the Inland Revenue. Broadly there are two such concessions. The first—I say this wearing my secondary, but in many ways more important, hat as Minister for Disabled People—allows disabled drivers to count their home-to-office travel as business mileage. The second grants exemptions from liability in certain circumstances in which a car is made available for use by a member of an employee's or a director's family. Once again, our aim is to ensure that our provisions follow as closely as possible those of the Inland Revenue. Our legal advice is that, under social security law, that can be achieved only by regulations.

Clause 2 extends the current arrangements for the collection of national insurance contributions to the new class 1A contributions. It includes provision for deciding who should pay the charge when employers share the cost of a car, allows for refunds in cases in which the contribution has been overpaid and provides a regulation-making power in respect of record keeping. That parallels existing provisions for class 1 contributions and will include, for example, the need for a record of contributions to be kept on deduction working sheets. The penalty provisions that exist in respect of other class 1 contributions have been extended to class 1A contributions and clause 2 also provides that previous non-payment of contributions can be declared before a court in cases in which legal proceedings are necessary to recover class 1A contributions.

The remaining four clauses, the House will be glad to hear, require only a brief explanation. Clause 3 extends the existing adjudicative system so that, where there is a dispute over class 1A contributions, employers will be able to apply to the Secretary of State for resolution of the question. Clause 4 provides that, as for all other contributions, a specified percentage of the new contributions shall be allocated to the national health service. That will make over an estimated £50 million to the NHS from the new contributions. Clause 5 contains provision for Northern Ireland. Finally, clause 6 contains consequential provisions and provides for the Act to have effect from 6 April 1991.

I have said that the purpose of the Bill is to put right an anomaly in the national insurance system which has arisen because of changing practices in employment remuneration. As a result of the Bill, employers will no longer find it so attractive from the financial point of view to pay their employees with cars rather than cash. The scale charge rules will ensure that contributions are levied on a valuation of cars and fuel which is easily understood and calculated. In 1992-93, we expect the new charge to generate some £550 million in respect of company cars and a further £60 million in respect of fuel. In terms of overall labour costs, that amounts to about 0·2 per cent.

The charges will be spread among some 300,000 employers, so the additional financial burden should not be exaggerated. Instead, the provisions of the Bill should be seen in the context of the Chancellor's overall Budget judgment, which was good for business. Other Budget measures provide significant improvements, worth £750 million in 1991-92, for business. As now, employers will have a choice of whether they want to provide cars for their employees' private use. If they do, they will now quite properly face a contribution liability in just the same way as if they had paid their employees in cash. I believe that the provisions are long overdue and I commend the Bill to the House.

5.17 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I am pleased to open a debate on behalf of my party for the first time. It is a unique occasion for me and may be rapidly followed by another unique occasion when I say that there is little in the Bill with which I can find fault. As the Government approach their dying days, they seem to be adopting more and more Labour party policies, so this may not be a unique occasion. I shall welcome the occasions on which I am at the Dispatch Box and can concur with most of what the Government say.

The Bill is essentially part of the Budget and its provisions might sit more easily in the Finance Bill. I am pleased to take this chance to thank my eminent colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), for nursing me not only through the provisions of the Bill, but through the Finance Bill last year. That was quite an experience for someone like myself.

Mr. Tim Smith: Now we know who writes the hon. Gentleman's speeches.

Mr. Allen: Indeed.

I must admit to some surprise that changing the regulations on company cars requires a social security Bill, although my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East will know that I am very much in favour of the budgetary process being opened up not only to include departmental Budget Bills, but to involve the departmental Select Committees of the House and outside organisations at the pre-Budget stage rather than having the wham, bam, thank you ma'am Budget speech that passes for the Budget process at the moment. A more protracted and intimate relationship between the Executive and the legislature is possible and essential in a modern democracy. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor, is committed to considering improvements to the budgetary process. He is in the enviable position that almost anything that he ultimately proposes must be an improvement on the current arbitrary, truncated and secretive process.

The Bill relates to national insurance contributions to be paid by employers for the first time in respect of company cars and fuel made available for private use. Most people outside this place will know that in shorthand as the company car perk. Coming new to these matters, it was explained to me that, at its simplest, a company car is

[Mr. Allen]

deemed to add an amount to an individual's income which is liable for tax. The controversy has always arisen over the size of that amount. Seeing certain hon. Members in the Chamber today, no doubt further controversy may arise about the actual amount that should be added to the income and be liable for tax. It has been and remains considerably cheaper for an employer to provide £100-worth of benefits in kind than to provide £100 in cash as net income.

The most popular benefit-in-kind device is the company car. I understand that company cars account for 80 per cent. of all benefits in kind. That accounts for the importance of the company car and explains why the Government are taking on that benefit in kind before any others. I welcome the fact that the Government are considering the matter seriously.

There can be little doubt that the company car as a device for avoiding fair tax is destined to diminish in popularity whetever party is in government. The tax regime in the United Kingdom has favoured payment in cars rather than in cash. Despite Government attempts to move to a fairer system, some further evolution may still be necessary, as the *Investors' Chronicle* survey of executive cars reported last year after the previous Chancellor's bite at the issue. The *Investors' Chronicle* stated that that earlier attempt brought "a sigh of relief".

"It could have been so much worse. Business had braced itself for a much higher rise, especially in respect of the 'perk' car which covers a small annual mileage. A rise of 50 per cent. in the scale benefit taxation and banding of Vehicle Excise Duty to penalise large cars had been forecast."

That report concluded on the rather weary note that future Chancellors would perhaps return to those issues and ensure that there was an equal balance between payment in kind and taxation.

In spite of the increasing burden of taxation under this Government, the effects of the recession and alleged corporate cost cutting, a recent report from the Monks Partnership revealed continuing and massive use of company cars in the United Kingdom in comparison to our neighbours. For example, in the United Kingdom 96 per cent. of senior financial posts come with a company car, compared with 29 per cent. in France.

The number of people paying tax on company cars has doubled to 2 million in the past four years according to the Inland Revenue. We appear to be a long way from the balance of advantage shifting towards using personal cars and claiming a mileage allowance for business use which is what some people would like to see. Fewer than 5 per cent. of companies expect to reduce the provision of cars and one quarter of employers intend to expand their fleets. It is still a matter of debate whether the proposals in this Bill have the balance right.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman has just quoted most interesting figures about the number of employers who expect to reduce or increase the number of company cars that they provide. When was that survey carried out? Was it carried out before this year's Budget or afterwards? The hon. Gentleman's figures seem to conflict with information that I have read in the newspapers.

Mr. Allen: The survey was conducted after last year's Budget.

Britain still tops the European league for company cars because, even after the proposals in this Bill, Britain will still have by far and away the most favourable company car tax regime in the world. The movement on car perks by consecutive Chancellors may owe more to the eye that they are keeping on potential European directives and European average levels of assistance than to the proposal to eliminate market distortions.

We should be aware of the distorting effect of unfair taxation on the motor industry. There are several eminent representatives of that industry in the Chamber today and they may wish to refer to that point later. Over-concentration on the company car market can weaken its competitiveness overseas. Paying less in tax may encourage companies to accept a slightly higher cost for the vehicles. Higher specifications demanded by company car fleet managers may mean that vehicles are produced to too high a specification to be competitive in certain overseas markets.

Mr. Thompson, the vice chairman of the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association, said:

"the corporate sector had tolerated such price increases and there is no sensible mechanism for controlling prices."

That may be part of the explanation why car prices in the United Kingdom are higher than in most parts of Europe. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report referred to in last week's *Financial Times* showed that some pre-tax car prices in the United Kingdom are more than 50 per cent. higher than in other European markets.

Business buyers account for an estimated 65 to 70 per cent. of new car sales in the United Kingdom. The *Financial Times* stated recently that partly as a result of that

"Manufacturers had felt able to impose price increases more readily than elsewhere."

When purchasing abroad is made easier after 1992, United Kingdom car makers may regret the price cushion that has distorted the company car market.

Another reason to tax company cars fairly was referred to by the Minister. They should be so taxed because of their adverse environmental consequences. According to a wide range of studies, company cars are used more, driven further and are larger than private cars. They are driven faster, and their drivers have more accidents, take more risks and drink more alcohol than the drivers of private cars. In addition, since 1988 free parking at work has been exempt from tax and national insurance contributions, adding a further incentive to bring cars to work and create congestion.

The National Economic Development Council has estimated that 90 per cent. of cars entering central London between 7 am and 1 pm are subsidised by companies. A study of free parking at work was recently carried out for the NEDC by Transport and Environmental Studies—or TEST. It was found that free parking is a more widespread perk than company cars and most motorists driving to work have their parking costs paid for. The TEST report proposed taxing company-provided parking spaces at a rate equivalent to their rateable or market values. TEST estimated the value of that perk as £2,000 a year for a space in the City of London and £300 a year in Swindon. I understand that the Treasury estimates are £1,500 and £500 respectively. Free parking has been estimated by Earth Resources research for Greenpeace to result in a £408 million revenue loss, comprising £288 million in tax,

£30 million in employees' national insurance contributions and £90 million in employers' national insurance contributions.

It should be noted that the exemption of tax and national insurance contributions on parking at work was introduced only in the 1988 Budget on the ground that calculations of its value were too complicated. Of course, since then the revaluation of business premises with the introduction of the uniform business rate has made valuation potentially easier.

The other main unresolved issue about company cars is evasion. There is some evidence that evasion is considerable and that much business use of cars is simply not declared. There are considerable discrepancies between Inland Revenue figures for those declaring company cars and Department of Transport registration figures. Earth Resources estimate that as many as half those using company cars may not be paying their full tax on them. There can be no question but that hidden subsidies to the car are detrimental not least to the taxpayer but to other transport users or providers such as the railways and other more environmentally friendly means of transportation. Greenpeace estimates that the company car subsidy costs £150 per household, or £3·4 billion, to the nation. Government funding for all forms of public transport is lower than the subsidy for company cars and investment in road transport.

A difficult matter that has been touched on by hon. Members is that the bona fide company car user is in a different category from highly paid executives who have a company car almost exclusively, as the Minister said, as an executive perk. That is a peculiarly British institution. The *Investors' Chronicle* put its finger on the issue when it said:

"Only the naive believe that companies provide employees with cars merely to allow them to perform their duties properly. User-choices perceive their cars as a reflection of their status."

Indeed, 70,000 individuals have two or more company cars. Of those earning over £35,000 a year, a staggering 73 per cent. have a company car.

There appears to be consensus that the present tax regime penalises the high business mileage user but is overly generous to high status and low business mileage users. Even after the passage of the Bill, future Governments will need to rethink their policy and relate the level of taxation more closely to business mileage. One aim could be to ensure that the high business mileage driver can be better off with a mileage allowance on his or her own car rather than a company car. Placing national insurance contributions on company cars is a long-overdue rectification of an unfair anomaly in our tax system.

Mr. Couchman: Is the hon. Gentleman under the impression that national insurance contributions are not presently leviable on the use of a company car for private use?

Mr. Allen: That is not my impression at all.

Future Governments may also regard it useful to have established the first significant precedent of levying national insurance contributions on fringe benefits, although since May 1988 national insurance contributions have been levied on gilts, but I do not regard that as a particularly significant precedent.

Mr. Couchman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way yet again?

Mr. Allen: If I may be allowed to continue the rest of my speech——

Mr. Couchman: I should like to put it right.

Mr. Allen: I have been very generous in giving way. The hon. Gentleman will seek to make his own speech shortly.

A further serious problem that has arisen concerns value added tax. I should be grateful if the Minister would consider the problem. I presume that the Government are seeking to encourage the payment of cash rather than kind or smaller cars plus cash rather than large cars. However, it now appears that VAT could become payable by an employer when cars are retained in preference to cash in lieu of cars or when a small car plus cash payment is made instead of a large car. I do not expect the Minister to spring to the Dispatch Box to answer that point—it is rather complicated. It could be possible for one arm of the Treasury, VAT collectors and Customs and Excise, to undermine the policy direction that is evident in the Bill by levying VAT, and prevent people from switching to cash payments or smaller cars. I should be grateful if the Minister would discuss that matter in the Department to see whether that is the case.

The answer to a recent parliamentary question by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East on 30 April showed that the Budget changes will raise an extra £550 million in respect of cars and £60 million in respect of fuel. That was reaffirmed by the Minister. However, those yields will be reduced by £200 million due to employers claiming corporation tax or income tax relief on their payments. That additional income for the national insurance fund is most welcome, not least because the fund is still carrying the immense and unnecessary burden of the £6·7 billion bribe to encourage individuals to take out private pension plans.

The measure is a small contribution, but it is welcome. For that reason if for no other reason, we generally welcome the Bill.

5.36 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I begin by declaring an interest. Since 1964, I have driven a company car. I have been allowed to use it for my private use. As chairman of my own family company, I drive an opulent Vauxhall Astra GL. I am concerned that the difference between the perk car and the workhouse car is inadequately differentiated by the Bill. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) seems to be unaware that, since 1975, national insurance contributions have been leviable on fuel provided by an employer for private use.

I declare a further interest. Recently, my small company had a pay-as-you-earn audit. One of the few things that the inspector picked up was the fact that we were not paying national insurance contributions on private fuel. However, he admitted that until 1989, when the so-called green book was issued, the fact that a sum was leviable on the private use of fuel supplied by an employer was a dark secret known not even to PAYE audit inspectors. That is extraordinary. The inspector concerned actually wants to go back six closed years. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that we are contesting that.

The matter has been peculiarly badly handled by the Department of Social Security, and it is a great sadness to

[Mr. James Couchman]

me, having served that Department for several years, that I am in conflict with it on this matter. The matter has not been clear to employers or employees. What is more, the impost that my right hon. Friend is being asked to make is to balance this year's Budget. Let us be under no illusions. It is interesting that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State answered our hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) in an evasive manner when our hon. Friend asked where contributions would reflect in benefits from the Department of Social Security—contributory benefits, presumably. That point was not answered.

When the Minister replies, I should be grateful if we could be told where that substantial sum of £0·5 billion will manifest itself in benefits for employees. It is interesting to note that the £0·75 billion of benefits in this year's Budget, which are apparently good for business, are shaded by the clawback under the impost. We are talking about the national insurance fund because the money that is raised by the contributions will go into that fund. Can we be sure that that fact will be reflected in the benefits to employees, and that it will not be clawed back by the Treasury to balance this year's budget?

I am also worried about what the provisions will do to the British car industry. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) will wish to make his own contribution on that score, because I know that he will be worried by the fact that the British motor industry will certainly not benefit from any diminution in the provision of company cars. From the newspapers that I have read in the past few days, I understand that companies are now preparing to buy themselves out of the provision of motor cars by providing large additional salaries. I have read the figure of as much as £10,000 per year. Clearly, that would be for a more opulent car than my Vauxhall Astra, but the principle is clear.

As I have said, I wonder about the damage that that will do to the British motor industry because if we buy our cars ourselves, we tend to go abroad for them rather than buy from the home market. That is because of the perceived benefits of other-than-British motor cars. As the big fleets comprise largely British motor cars, any diminution in the provision of company cars by employers will damage the British motor industry.

The other thing that I should like to make clear——

Mr. Tim Smith: Before my hon. Friend gets on to the other thing, does he not agree that it is an appalling indictment of the British motor car industry that, apparently, it is sustained at the moment only by company car fleets, and that, if individuals had a choice, they would go abroad for their motor cars?

Mr. Roger King *rose*——

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, to which I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield wishes to reply.

Mr. King: The point is not that the private buyer is disillusioned with the quality of the British-built product; it is that, if the private buyers want to drive something that is more original and a little different, as opposed to something that can be seen in the average driveways of the kingdom, such as Cavaliers, Montegos and Sierras, that buyer might be tempted to buy something from an overseas manufacturer. But that in no way reflects any inadequacy in the British product.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because my son, who is aged 22 and is car mad, speaks pejoratively of the Cavalier as "the rep's motor" which, indeed, it is; as my hon. Friend has said, many of the big fleets consist of Cavaliers, Sierras and Montegos. That is why I think that the provisions will do considerable damage to the British motor industry.

I have another brief point to raise—I know that the House will not want to be detained by me for any great length of time on this point. I refer to the concept that, in some magic way, someone on £8,500 is a higher-paid employee. I pay more than that wage in my business to bar staff and it is my understanding that £8,500 is about two thirds of average earnings. One can hardly consider that a representative who earns £8,000 or £9,000 a year and who is on two thirds of average earnings is a higher-paid employee. The impost will hit hard the companies of those who are quite lowly paid.

I hold no brief whatsoever for the company director who never uses his company-provided car for business and for whom that car is a pure perk. I am happy to see such company directors pay tax on their cars. However—I come back to where I started—the impost will be unfair on the companies of those people who use their company-provided car for their job and who cannot otherwise do that job sensibly or viably.

Eighteen thousand miles may seem a high mileage, especially to those who do their business in London and the home counties, but I doubt whether those whose business is in rural areas and who have a wide area to cover will regard it as a high mileage. There should be some differential between those people who do their business miles in London and those who do them in rural areas, where miles come easily on to the mileometer.

5.44 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I have no intention of opposing the Bill, but should like to support some of the comments of the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), especially his point about the number of miles travelled for business purposes. That is important to me, coming from a rural part of Scotland and representing a rural constituency. I hope that the Government will give further consideration to that matter.

I start by being slightly pedantic. I do not accuse Social Security Ministers on this point, because I know that they are not masters of their own destiny when it comes to the way in which legislation is put through the House. However, I am puzzled and a bit nervous about such legislation being put through all its stages in one evening. I am doubly worried because, as a result of this matter being part of the Budget provisions, there was not much time to canvass views more widely before the measure was announced in the Budget statement.

We have had an assurance—I am sure that it will be honoured—that there will be consultations thereafter, but bringing forward such primary legislation on an evening like this and with a low attendance of hon. Members is a casual way of submitting the legislation to the statutory processes. There must be constitutional and legal reasons for it, but I cannot understand why the Bill does not form

an integral part of the Finance Bill. I have no doubt that hon. Members who serve on the Finance Bill Standing Committee will spend long and happy hours upstairs considering the totality of the Government's financial proposals in the Budget. That would be a much better vehicle for giving this measure the proper consideration that it is due.

It is a small Bill, and I agree with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) that it is a technical Bill which is difficult to understand, but £550 million-worth of national insurance fund contributions are to be raised, with an additional £60 million from fuel. As that is a very big sum of money on any definition, for that reason alone we cannot dismiss the Bill as unimportant.

I am interested that the financial and explanatory memorandum states that "50 staff years" of additional manpower are involved. The Minister of State skated over this matter—I do not know whether he did so deliberately—but he seemed to think that the extra administrative costs were fairly small beer. I wonder whether that will be the perception of the people who will have to pay the contributions for the new administrative scheme.

If the Government are to bring in the extra impost, I agree that the Inland Revenue machinery is by far the most efficient and least disruptive way of doing so, but it is not enough to say, "Using the existing systems will make no difference," because I do not think that that is true. There will be a significant increase in bureaucracy, which will fall on the shoulders of the employers, many of whom will be small employers.

Although the provision of company cars has been abused and, as the hon. Member for Gillingham said, the Government are right to tackle that abuse, there is a world of difference between the tax perk that is now an accustomed part of the stock in trade of the finance directors of big firms where fleets of company cars are used as a form of surrogate remuneration, and the little knitwear companies in my constituency, such as in the town of Hawick, which have only one works van. They use the works van six days a week to take the piecework to the outworkers so that they can knit up pieces of garments and bring them back to the factory for processing and packing. They also use the van at weekends.

I listened carefully to the Minister's speech and I assume that employees such as district nurses in rural areas will not be affected by the Bill.

Mr. Couchman: We have also had representations recently from charities that allow cars which are provided to people earning more than £8,500 a year to be used for private mileage, so the Bill will be an impost on charities.

Mr. Kirkwood: Some employers that are not commercial organisations will be caught under the provisions. I am anxious that we should have a full discussion, and that Ministers provide a complete explanation of the extent of the Bill's effect before we take it further.

I agree with the hon. Member for Gillingham that the Government should reconsider the limit of £8,500. The Bill will have a dire impact on employers and employees of small companies. That figure represents only two thirds of average national earnings. That is not a large sum of money, and I cannot work out why the Government decided to impose a limit at £8,500; the figure cannot have been plucked out of nowhere.

Mr. Tim Smith: It has always been like that.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is news to me. I freely confess my ignorance; I am sure that the Minister will confirm whether what I have said is the case. If it is an established figure in Inland Revenue rules, that is obviously why it was chosen. Has the Department considered the effects that it will have, and have Ministers considered the possibility of making exemptions so that the tax would not affect small businesses and the directors and employees of small companies who earn relatively small salaries, as £8,500 is a small annual income?

The Minister said that the Bill will affect 2 million cars and 300,000 employees. Do the Government have any idea how that figure is broken down? What is the profile of the average employer or employee that the Bill is designed to catch? If it is big companies and their employees, I would find it easier to allow the Bill to complete its passage. However, if the burden will fall disproportionately on small companies, I would see it from a different perspective.

Finally, I should like some reassurance. Have the Government considered using engine size as a way of bringing back into control the abuse of company cars? The Minister made a valid point when he said that there are environmental aspects to controlling the use and abuse of company cars.

Mr. Tim Smith: It depends on the size of the engine.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am perfectly well aware that there is a scale for company cars based on engine size, but the Government have the possibility of making it more advantageous financially for companies to buy smaller cars, so that company directors would run around in 1300 cc Vauxhall Astras. Have the Government considered making smaller cars totally exempt from taxation? In future, all Government Departments will have to look at the tax burden on motoring costs in general.

The Government are right to end the present anomaly. I am certainly prepared to allow the Bill a Second Reading, but I object to the way in which it is being put through the House in one evening. The Government still have to answer some of the questions about which people will carry the cost of the new impost that the Bill will introduce.

5.55 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I do not welcome the measure, although I well understand the difficulties faced by my right hon. Friend the Minister in presenting the Bill this afternoon. The measure was included in the recent Budget, so it is no surprise that it has surfaced today.

It is unfortunate at this time in our economic resurgence to place further financial burdens on our motor industry. I do not disagree with the motives behind the claim that the perk that the company car offers a number of working people needs to be tackled. About 10 per cent. of those who have company cars have them simply as a perk. I am concerned that, in tackling the problem in order to raise money—my right hon. Friend explained earlier that the measure was designed to bridge a financial gap in the Budget—it is likely to have some disadvantages that the Government have not thought through thoroughly.

The problem with the company car was created when we had stop-go wages policies, and employees were

[Mr. Roger King]

rewarded with company cars instead of salaries, which were then very heavily taxed. That trend started a process which has grown into the present problem. However, it goes further than that. The United Kingdom is a densely populated country, and our population is scattered throughout our land. We seek to bring employment and opportunity to all regions of the kingdom, and the only way to do that is by means of a system of communications which is available to everyone, and for people to travel freely.

If we are anxious to create jobs and employment prospects in remote areas, we must enable the equipment needed for that employment to be purchased relatively cheaply and to be readily available. That is why the car has played such a formidable part in bringing employment to the more remote areas of our country. Jobs cannot depend on rail connections, if there are any. Businesses cannot wait for the next bus to turn up. They need components and goods to be supplied when they want them, and people must have the opportunity to make deliveries.

The necessity for the true company car has been overshadowed by the perk element, which has got out of hand in recent years. In successive Budgets, the Government have raised the tax bands, and that has brought the company car into balance between a perk and an essential business tool. The proposal we are discussing cannot be seen in isolation. It has to be considered in terms of the increase in tax bands that the Chancellor announced in the Budget, plus the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax. A car attracts 27·3 per cent. tax. No other product on sale in the Kingdom is taxed that highly; in Germany, there in only a 14 per cent. tax on cars. The combination of measures that the Government have introduced has exacerbated a problem which may come to the fore during the next few months.

There is no doubt that the British car industry is enjoying a good time, but I must stress that it is the manufacturing industry—times are far from rosy in the retail sector. About 350 large dealers have gone out of business in the past year. Nevertheless, manufacturers have been able to sustain and even increase production as a result of producing goods which have an enviable record for quality and market acceptability, and they are exporting increasing quantities. We need a strong and healthy home market behind those exports, and we do not have one at the moment. Sales are declining: they are now down to 1·6 million units per year, from a high of 2·3 million in 1989.

My fear is that the combination of measures introduced in the Budget and in this Bill will further exacerbate that problem. There are signs that the European market and other world markets, which are not untouched by the change in the world economic climate, are tending to dry up, and manufacturers in the United Kingdom will not have a buoyant home market to pick up the shortfall that will result from dwindling imports.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I apologise for not hearing my hon. Friend's opening remarks. Manufacturing industry is now heavily dependent on the export side, especially in the case of General Motors in my constituency, as 80 per cent. of its Vector cars, produced at Luton, are going for export. My hon. Friend is right to point out that that market is very fragile. Because of the nature of the country that they are going to—Germany, which has its own problems—those exports could dry up at a stroke. That is why this further blow to the manufacturing industry must be considered by the Government, and I agree with everything that he has said so far. Manufacturing companies could be in a serious position if those exports decline or disappear before the end of the year.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend endorses my argument. The Vauxhall Cavalier is the biggest selling fleet car. Any shortfall in demand from the United Kingdom market will have a substantial effect upon the viability of General Motors' operations in this country. That fact needs to be stressed, because the car industry offers tremendous opportunities. We have few industries which can look forward to a positive expansionist programme in the next 10 years and which can largely overcome our balance of payment difficulties. Some forecasters predict that, by the year 2000, the motor industry alone can bridge the gap in our balance of payments deficit, provided that it has the encouragement it needs to expand and invest.

One of the reasons that the United Kingdom has proved attractive to incoming investment from companies such as Nissan, Toyota and Honda is that there is a substantial bedrock of sales in the company car sector. Whatever one might think about the evil nature of the company car, it has enabled the United Kingdom market to sell 700,000 cars a year to that sector. It is a lucrative market for manufacturers, and as a consequence it has attracted many overseas companies, which come here and set up plants to cater for it.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend's argument about the company car market is valid. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who opened the debate for the Opposition, made much of the fact that 65 per cent. of new car sales are to the company car market. However, I heard the other day that there are 20 million cars on our roads and only 13 per cent. are company-owned, because they are sold off.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend is correct. The average life of a company car is three years. Some are called company cars but are bought by companies such as Hertz and Avis, and have a life of nine months before they go into the used car market. Companies seek to dispose of company cars after three years. The Budget caused a problem within the industry, as companies are tending to replace cars after four years, and it is difficult for the British car industry to bridge that one-year gap.

It is evident that when employers consider the costs of providing a company car there is a strong temptation for them to buy out that perk—if one can use that expression—and replace it with a higher salary. Perhaps an economist could point out the consequences of that for inflation.

Also, there is the risk, as has been said, and as research shows, that, if employees are left free to buy their own cars, they will not want to buy a Vauxhall Cavalier or a Sierra—excellent though those products are—but will choose something a little more individual, which will almost certainly be imported either from Japan or from the rest of Europe. That is a fact of life. We do not always want to be like everyone else in the street. We want to express our individuality, so we buy something a little different. In car industry terms, such a product will come from abroad. It

does not need many people to do that before it has a substantial impact on the United Kingdom car industry, and that would have serious consequences if it were repeated on a grand scale.

Undoubtedly, the House will see fit to approve the proposals before us, but I feel that it is right to express a few cautionary remarks. I accept that, having been landed this legislation, my hon. Friend the Minister cannot restructure the way in which these new charges will be imposed, but I certainly hope that the Government will see whether they can arrive at a fairer system.

The distinction between perk car and work car has defied Government for some considerable time. They tend to cover the lot by using some sort of mileage cutoff point, on the assumption that someone who does 18,000 miles a year is driving a works car and that someone who drives less is presumably driving a perk car. That is a crude dividing line, and it is long overdue for overhaul.

The first impositions made by the Government, taxing company cars and their benefits, were rough and ready and did not have a hard hitting financial impact upon users. That impact has become progressively harder, until it is now arguable whether there are any benefits in having a company car. With the addition of national insurance charges, the balance is definitely tipped against the company car in all respects.

The Government should redouble their efforts to arrive at a fairer banding system. It does not make any sense for the person who has a Sierra or a Cavalier estate, who perhaps services and maintains products or provides replacement goods for shops in central London and drives only 6,000 or 8,000 miles a year—although he spends a large part of his working life in his car, which is a business tool—to get little discount because he does not do the arbitrary limit of 18,000 miles.

Mr. Couchman: Is my hon. Friend aware that to do 18,000 miles in London, where the average speed is 12 mph, requires about 30 hours' driving a week, which is near to a working week?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend endorses the point I am making.

Mr. Tim Smith: Give that sort of driver a van.

Mr. King: I am sure that some employers consider the suggestion that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) makes, but few will want to drive, say, a Transit or Sherpa van to deliver some fuses or packaging or cartons of cigarettes or sweets. A van is a large vehicle to use in London and is hardly environmentally acceptable if instead one can use a small car.

I hope that the Minister will redouble his efforts to draw up a more equitable system of bands. It would be fairer to have a cut-off point of 10,000 miles, with anything over that attracting a 15 per cent. discount; a cut-off of 18,000 miles for a further discount; with a maximum cut-off of 24,000 miles—a very high mileage, which should confirm that it is a genuine company car which should attract an even bigger discount. That would be fair to those who must have a company car as a tool of the trade.

The subject must be examined from the employee's point of view. I hesitate to suggest that employees do not welcome a company car; sometimes it is not the product or style that they want, but it goes with the job. The job usually reflects the advantage of a company car by attracting a somewhat lower salary than one might normally expect. For an employee to have the privilege of a company car standing in his drive, his employer must pay the extra charges, and that represents an enormous and unique imposition. After all, if a secretary has a piece of vital equipment on her desk—say, a word processor—to improve her working performance, neither she nor the company is taxed on the cost of that equipment.

Mr. John Carlisle: Perhaps my hon. Friend should remind my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) that a company car is often an essential tool of business. If we tax everything that looks like a perk—any article that might have a feel of luxury about it that we take home—where do we stop? We must consider the principle involved. *[Interruption.]* I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield that we are not dealing with a laughing or flippant matter, since the retail and manufacturing sectors of the motor industry are reeling from the taxation proposals.

Along with ridiculous statements that have been made about car phones, the impression has been given that the Government are against the car manufacturing industry, let alone against company cars. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) has not taken any notice of some of the naive remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend may not have been aware that I had picked up a remark about vans by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield. Many employees have no choice, because their companies require them to take their cars home, often because they are on call. A plumber or electrician or an employee providing any other service to the community is on call, as is the company car.

A company based in Birmingham might have a representative in Basingstoke. It is suggested that every night, having finished servicing whatever it is in the Basingstoke area, that employee should take the car back to the works in Birmingham, go home to Basingstoke and repeat the journey the following morning to pick up the vehicle? That is so ludicrous as to be beyond comment. In such a case, the company car is a piece of business equipment and only as a side effect would it be used at the weekend. Indeed, an employee driving a company car doing a high mileage would not want to drive hundreds of miles at the weekend.

One could make a strong case for an almost total exemption from the type of measure we are debating. As I said, I accept that the measure will receive the approval of the House. Even so, we should examine some of its technicalities. We should examine the structure of the tax banding of company cars. We must consider that in the context of the Finance Bill, and perhaps we shall have an opportunity in due course to do that.

6.14 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) is a doughty fighter for the motor industry. If I represented his constituency, I would have made many of the remarks that he made, and we appreciate the position in which he finds himself. My constituency allows me to take a wider view of the issues, although I probably have a high proportion of company car drivers among my constituents.

[Mr. Tim Smith]

I know from my experience in industry what goes on. There is much status-seeking among company car drivers. I recall getting my first job in industry and my first opportunity to drive a company car. At that time, the large accounting firms did not give company cars to their employees and getting a car was for me an attraction of moving to industry. I was asked what sort of car I would like. I asked how much I could spend. Having been told, I went hunting for a car with all the right knobs; I wanted a GT with power steering and so on.

Mr. Couchman: Why not?

Mr. Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. From my point of view, it was a reasonable desire because I wanted the best possible car and the best remuneration package. But this debate is not about the interests of individual company employees. It is about how we tax what, in view of what I have said, is clearly a perk.

Mr. John Carlisle: No.

Mr. Smith: I disagree with my hon. Friend. The matters which interested me had nothing to do with the economic performance of the company. I was looking for the best deal, and who would not? We should be considering the economic performance of industry. We have heard much in the debate about the difference between perks and the tools of the trade and about vans. Company vans are not subject to this type of taxation. When buying a company van one does not pay car tax. The input VAT is recoverable against the output VAT, unlike the VAT on a car, and no taxation is paid in terms of a benefit in kind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northfield referred to service engineers. They might be better off with company vans, on which tax would not have to be paid. We must concentrate on the fundamentals of the subject.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I imagine that during his business career my hon. Friend has taken clients to lunch, for example, to discuss important business arrangements. Would he suggest that overseas clients should be taken to a restaurant in a van?

Mr. Smith: I normally use a taxi in such circumstances. I was not aware that service engineers took customers to lunch. But since, according to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), they spend up to 30 hours a week driving, perhaps that is what they are doing.

I accept that for some people a company car is essential. We recognise that it is taken home at weekends and is driven on holidays and so on. It would be possible for company employees to emulate Ministers and take cars from a pool. They could travel to work by public transport and use a pool car for their work.

Mr. John Carlisle: Rubbish.

Mr. Smith: Companies could make such an arrangement. If Ministers can do it, so can other people.

The Bill has my full support. It is part of a much wider Budget judgment and the issue that we must consider when discussing the future of the car industry is the same issue as we must consider in relation to the future of every industry.

The Budget was excellent for business and we must set against the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield made the fact that it reduced corporation tax progressively by 2 per cent. My hon. Friend said that Japanese car manufacturers have invested in the United Kingdom because we have a large company car fleet. Although that may have been a consideration, there were far more important considerations such as the fact that we have a good industrial relations record, a low-wage economy and the most attractive corporation tax regime in Europe. It has now been made even more attractive by virtue of the Budget, which cut corporation tax by 2 per cent., benefiting industry by some £830 million in the year when the levy will first be raised.

In the light of the Budget, the measure is entirely sensible. I sympathise with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who said that it should have been introduced in the Finance Bill. But the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and I are representing the other 39 members of the Standing Committee and we should be able to tell them next week what was said in this debate. Although I sympathise with the view of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North that it is rather anomalous, it comes about by virtue of the fact that social security benefits and contributions and the whole national insurance system are separate from the income tax system, as they should be.

I am interested in the new Contributions Agency established on 1 April, which will have the job of collecting £550 million in June next year and in subsequent years. In view of the sum involved, I am sure that the Public Accounts Committee will want to look at the agency's performance. That is why I raised the matter with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North referred to the possibility of evasion and suggested that it could be on a wide scale. If so, the Public Accounts Committee should examine that problem.

On the general principle, I believe that the Government are right to tax all benefits in kind across the board, so that they are treated, for the purposes of tax and national insurance, as far as possible like cash payments. That seems to be the right philosophical approach. Although the hon. Member for Nottingham, North implied that the measure had come rather late, it would not have been possible to introduce it much earlier because it was only in the 1989 Budget that employers' contributions were extended up the scale and it would have produced relatively little revenue before then. Therefore, the timing is right and, in due course, we may consider extending the levying of employers' national insurance contributions on other benefits in kind; it would be a logical extension. However, company cars are the biggest benefit in kind paid to employees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham referred to the current position. I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Nottingham, North was aware of the fact that a national insurance employer's contribution is already charged on private fuel. It was causing considerable difficulties before this measure was introduced. I wrote to many finance directors last year about tax implications and it was one of the main issues that they raised in their replies. They said, "We hear what you say about income tax, but are you aware of how hellish the Department of Social Security is making life for us by levying national insurance contributions on private fuel?" They said that company employees who pay for their fuel with a plastic card and present the card before they fill up their car with petrol pay no contributions. However, if they fill up their

car first and hand in their card afterwards, they must pay contributions on the cost of the fuel. That sounds like bad news for those who must keep the books or records. I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs, who was in charge of the deregulation unit, and said that he should look at the problem. I suggested that there should be a scale charge. The Bill now introduces a scale charge for fuel as well as for cars and that excellent change will lighten the load on employers.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) referred to the fact that there would be 50 extra staff and additional burdens on employers. I wonder how much the charge will create an additional burden on employers, given the fact that it will be levied in the same way as income tax, through the P11D, and that employers were having such a hard time before in their record keeping. The measure should be relatively simple because the same scale of charges will be applied for both income tax and national insurance. I hope that it will not be too onerous because I am reluctant to impose additional burdens on employers who are already unpaid collectors of tax on behalf of the Government.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend suggested that the contributions will be levied through the P11D mechanism, which is principally aimed at levying tax on the employee rather than the employer. It is often levied through a diminution in the code number much later than was suggested by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State in his opening remarks. I suspect that the mechanism may prove to be not nearly so simple as we were led to believe earlier in the debate.

Mr. Smith: I referred specifically to the P11D. The information required to complete the P11D form is the same as is required to pay employers' national insurance contributions on cars and private fuel. I accept that the P11D is a statement to the Inland Revenue about employees' benefits in kind, so perhaps I should not have referred specifically to it. The point that I wished to make was that the information is common to both requirements. Employers will not need to keep much new or additional information because of the Bill. I listened to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on that subject and it did not seem that much additional information would be needed. Perhaps we can return to that important issue later.

As I was saying, some employers were having a hard time—my right hon. Friend the Minister of State may also be having a hard time with his pay-as-you-earn audit—because of the previous arrangements for collecting contributions on private fuel. The scale charge introduced by the Bill is a major improvement.

For those reasons, the Bill is to be welcomed. Benefits in kind should be taxed in the same way as cash. I recognise the problems of the motor industry, but they can be better tackled in other ways, rather than trying to solve them by looking at the way in which we tax benefits in kind.

6.27 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I hope that those who have participated in the debate will not think me rude for coming in rather late. I do not normally seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unless I have heard the opening speeches. However, the title of the Bill is somewhat misleading. I thought that it must have something to do with social security, and not being a social security expert, I kept away. As soon as I entered the Chamber I realised that a more appropriate title might have been, "Clobber the Motor Industry yet more through Additional Social Security Contributions Bill". It is a silly little Bill—an unworthy little Bill—and is totally inappropriate for a country that is in deep recession with thousands of people being laid off in the motor industry and elsewhere. I believed, perhaps naively, that the Conservative party and the Government were primarily engaged in trying to support and encourage businesses, not in introducing pettifogging little measures that further damage them. I may have been ingenuous, but I also thought that we were not primarily tasked to create additional unproductive jobs in the public sector and not in the business of creating additional quangos such as the Contributions Agency.

I thought that we were sent to this place by those who elected us to do everything in our power to support British industry and those who work in it. I see nothing in the Bill that will have this effect, but quite a lot that will do considerable damage. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), who is an expert on the motor industry, and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), who intervened, spoke from the heart and the head, and with experience.

I must declare an interest and, in case hon. Members think that it is a matter of special pleading, I shall disabuse them of that notion. I am a director and the chairman of a small marketing consultancy. My own little company is in business to promote, largely overseas, the sale of British equipment. For companies such as mine, and many other small businesses that are primarily engaged in selling, a motor car is absolutely indispensable. I find it incomprehensible that Her Majesty's Government should be putting further imposts on company cars at a time of recession. It is even more surprising that they are using the social security system as a means of doing so.

Other hon. Members have referred to the arbitrary earnings limit of £8,500 per annum for employees. Many company directors do not even earn that, and their companies will now have to pay national insurance on their company cars, as well as for any fuel used for private purposes. The amount of revenue generated will be relatively small and it would have been infinitely more honest not to use the national insurance fund as a vehicle for bringing more taxation into the Government Exchequer. I believe that national insurance resources fund only about 10 per cent. of pensions and that the rest come out of taxation. If that is so, and we use the national insurance fund as a means of gathering revenue, it would be much more straightforward to abolish it—at least, it would be much more honest.

Does my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State think that the Bill is well drafted? I think that it is a masterpiece of gobbledegook and a fantastic testimonial to the incomprehensible. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be able to clarify clause 1(6)—if she cannot, the legislation should not be passed. Clause 1(6) states:

"In calculating for the purpose of subsection (4) above the cash equivalent of the benefit of a car or fuel—(a) the car shall not be treated as being unavailable on a day by virtue of paragraph 22)(b) of Schedule 6 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 for the purposes of section 158(5) of that Act or paragraphs 2(2), 3(2) or 5(2) of that

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

Schedule, unless the person liable to pay the contribution has information to show that the condition specified in paragraph 2(2)(b) is satisfied as regards that day".

My hon. Friend the Under Secretary nods her head wisely. I admire her. But civil servants would be much better employed not producing such nonsense. The motor industry would be much better if it were allowed to get on with its job of satisfying the customer without such an idiotic little Bill.

We have a serious recession on our hands and it is important to get on and address it, and support the motor industry. I had the honour and privilege of being awarded a parliamentary industrial fellowship with GKN, a major automotive supplier, of which there are countless up and down the land. Any measure passed by the House which has a depressing effect on the automotive industry in general can only be deplored and should be rejected. I shall not bother to vote against it, because almost all Opposition Members have now gone; what they said had little to commend itself to me.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) talked about yet more taxes. There has been an element of obfuscation surrounding the measure. Her Majesty's Government were, at least implicitly, kowtowing to the green lobby by suggesting that imposing such an impost and increasing taxation on company cars would benefit the environment. All that they are doing is to add to the dole queues, which is not worthy of them.

6.35 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), I apologise to the House for not being present at the start of the debate. Like him, I saw the measure on the Order Paper and assumed that it was a social security matter. It was only when I came into the Chamber to hear the debate that I realised the enormous impact that the measure would have on the motor industry.

I immediately declare a professional interest: I am a non-executive director of a medium-sized motor retailing company. My constituency interest is already known—part of my constituency contains Vauxhall Motors, the largest employer in Luton. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) said, the company has enjoyed a certain amount of prosperity during the past few years, and has brought back boom times to my constituency town.

However, I fear that if the Government continue with the various measures proposed in the Budget and other provisions, such as the special car tax, those boom times could well be over, not just for us as a manufacturing town but for many other companies that will be deeply affected by this imposition on the company car.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood that this appears to be a shabby little measure which says more about the politics of envy than the politics of good sense. Frankly, we are more accustomed to hear about such measures from Opposition Members than from Conservative Members. The Government do themselves no credit with this Bill, which stupidly panders to the so-called green lobby and fails to recognise the enormous improvements that the industry has made to reduce noise and air pollution over the years.

Social security Ministers and their colleagues in the Treasury must understand that the measure will have a devastating impact on the car industry if it means, as I believe it could, that many companies decide that the company car is not for them and, perhaps more important, employees decide that the benefits of a company car do not make it worthwhile to pay the tax. There are about 150 to 200 company cars in my company, which is now considering charging its employees for the use of their cars because of the additional cost of the national insurance. Therefore, employees will be further penalised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northfield was absolutely right to say that if people do not have company cars, which are generally British, or are given some other financial benefit in kind, they buy foreign cars. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) made a ribald comment about that. However, when a large employer that gave its employees hefty discounts on certain British manufactured cars withdrew that discount and gave money in lieu, nearly every employee bought a foreign car—I shall not name the company.

The measure is not worthy, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood said, for various reasons the motor industry is on its knees. The figures for new car sales are dramatic—350 motor retailers have gone out of business in the past 12 months. Every manufacturer is reporting that new car sales are at least 20 per cent. lower. It is only the service industry and, to a certain extent, the contract hire and retail side which are keeping many retailers in business. For the Government to bring forward such a petty little measure is disgraceful. It is viewed with utter dismay by manufacturers and retailers at a time when we should be looking for assistance for them.

Mr. Roger King: My hon. Friend is the second person to refer to the Bill as a petty little measure. It is not a petty or a little measure: it will raise a large sum of money. That is the problem. If the amount involved were little, we would not worry unduly, but nearly £500 million will come out of the pockets of companies which will have difficulty in replacing it. Something will give. My fear and that of my hon. Friend is that it might be British industry.

Mr. Carlisle: I thoroughly agree, and I thank my hon. Friend for pointing that out. The pettiness is perhaps in the minds of those who conceived the idea.

The motor industry is crucial to the fortunes of the country. Let no one forget that. The Conservative party has always supported free choice on transport. We have always controlled strictly pollution within the industry. Indeed, the industry has carried us through rough times. We are now in deep recession both inside and outside the industry. The measure will sadden the hearts of our supporters and of people in the industry.

The Bill should be rejected by the House, but I will not embarrass my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) by going to get my hon. Friends out of offices and bars to vote against it. That might be even more embarrassing for the Government. However, many of us are deeply upset by the measure. Had we the opportunity, we would vote against it.

6.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): We have had an interesting debate, with three main themes, all of which I

believe to have been ill advised. The first was a misconception, particularly on the part of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), that somehow the Bill will cause great financial embarrassment and will have huge economic effects on the car industry.

We should see the matter in context. The overall labour costs of the industry for this year will be £300 billion. We are talking about a sum of £500 million. We are talking about an increase in cost of 0·2 per cent., whereas labour costs alone, through wage rises, are likely to increase by 7 per cent. to 10 per cent. We have to keep in context the alleged financial effects of the Bill on the car industry.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does not my hon. Friend realise that, at a time of recession, when jobs are being lost in the motor industry, Her Majesty's Government, if they are to act wisely, should eschew any additional impost which would put an extra adverse burden on the motor industry or which would depress demand further? As for small businesses, they will get virtually nothing from the Budget. Those with the lowest profits will get no reduction in corporation tax. The requirement to pay national insurance on company cars is yet another unwelcome, adverse development. My hon. Friend should not be so glib.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend makes the point for me by admitting that in the Budget there is a net gain to the industry through the reduction in corporation tax.

In answer to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), may I point out that the vast burden will fall on large employers rather than on small employers in relation to company cars as tools of trade.

Fear has been expressed, most notably and eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), about the administrative burden that the provision will place on the motor car industry. In fact, there will be very little administrative burden. There should be a lightening of the burden. He referred to the current arrangements of levying on fuel, which we admit are more complex than we had intended.

Two themes run through the Bill. The first is to make things easier for employers by replicating exactly the provisions of the Inland Revenue, so that it will already have to hand the information, the system and the calculations. The provisions will replace the complicated administrative system that was required following the overdrive decision to which attention has rightly been drawn. In this instance, the effect will be wholly beneficial.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his first speech on these matters in the House. I regret that I cannot associate myself with his wholesale attack on company car ownership. The purpose of the Bill is not to make life difficult for company car owners but to achieve equity between those who draw their income in cash and those who draw income in substantial benefit through a company car. That is the sole purpose of the Bill. It has no other.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Minister's last point is fair. The Labour party shares those objectives.

Miss Widdecombe: It is because there is so much cross-party agreement on the Bill that we can deal with it in one day, a point raised by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North.

The provisions will not be brought into effect tomorrow. There will be a long period of detailed consultation about the administrative aspects of the Bill.

What we are doing is very fair and straight in regard to taxation. If the car industry was handing the money to its employees in straightforward salary income rather than by company cars, it would have to pay the national insurance contributions.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend talks about the car industry giving up the money. The Bill has nothing to do with the car industry. It will affect every employer, whatever his business, be it service or manufacturing, who provides company cars for employees who earn more than £8,500 and who allows them to use the cars privately.

Miss Widdecombe: That is absolutely true. My reference to the car industry was a slip. It has been so widely discussed in the debate that the two have almost become linked in my mind. My hon. Friend is right: the Bill will affect all employers, and what I have said applies to all employers. Any employer who hands out cash rather than a company car would at present have to pay a national insurance contribution, so there is no reason why he should not pay a contribution on the company car.

We have also heard that the Bill will have a very bad effect on the entire British car industry because, if people have a choice, they will buy foreign cars. I bought my own car, and I bought British. My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) tells me that he bought British. Why is there an assumption that, if people have to buy their own cars, they will buy foreign cars?

Mr. John Carlisle: My hon. Friend is being unfair. I am afraid that she is speaking from ignorance. It is not an assumption. Those of us who are in the trade could give her figures, if she wanted them, which would prove that those who are handed the money tend to buy foreign cars —for exactly the reasons which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) has given. If my hon. Friend were sure of her facts, I would believe her, but she is on dangerous ground in talking from a brief that does not have the facts. Sadly, the reality is that people buy foreign cars, not British cars.

Miss Widdecombe: All I was challenging was the assumption that, if people had to buy their own cars rather than company cars, they would automatically choose foreign cars. There are fleets of foreign cars, and the purchase of such cars is not confined to the private buyer.

Mr. Wilkinson: If an employer wishes to provide an employee with a car that will be needed for the business, and if that employee has to buy the car out of his after-tax personal income, the employer will have to pay him much more than the cost of providing him with a car to do his job. That is an additional burden, and anything that discourages employers from providing company cars, such as the necessity to pay national insurance on that so-called benefit, is thoroughly adverse and negative.

Miss Widdecombe *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. May I ask the hon. Lady not to turn her back on the Chair when she replies to her hon. Friend?

Miss Widdecombe: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I stand corrected, facing the right way round.

[Miss Widdecombe]

The Bill's main thrust is exactly what my hon. Friend says: by providing a company car instead of salary, thus avoiding liability to national insurance contributions, the employer, and to a lesser extent the employee, will benefit. That is what we are trying to control.

According to Inland Revenue figures, two thirds of company cars travel more than 2,500 miles per year. That means that tools-of-trade cars, those covering between 2,500 and 18,000 miles per year, make up a large proportion of the total. We are trying to make it easier for those who use their cars as tools of trade to be able validly to do so, as opposed to those who use such cars purely as a perk. Clearly, cars which cover fewer than 2,500 miles a year are being used as perks.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked where the burden would fall most heavily. A director with a new car costing, say, £25,000 who covers fewer than 2,500 business miles a year would have a scale charge for the car of £8,250, and free fuel would be worth £900. The total contribution liability would be £950. A typical sales representative covering more than 18,000 business miles a year in a car costing less than £19,250 and with an engine capacity of less than 1400 cc would have a total liability of only £130. Therefore, there is a marked distinction between the burden falling on those who clearly use their cars for less than business purposes and those who use them a great deal.

I shall not address the issue which will be debated in Committee but which was mentioned on Second Reading about those who have a small private mileage. The national travel survey shows that those with tools-of-trade cars covering more than 18,000 miles a year have an average private mileage of 8,600 per year. That is substantial. The number of people affected who have a one or two-mile drive home and to work will be minimal. That will be addressed at greater length in Committee.

The Bill does not seek to clobber the car industry or to make life difficult for employers. The administrative burden for them will be a great deal less. The Bill simply seeks to make sure that the same rules apply to those who take their income in cash as to those who take their income in kind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood asked whether I understood clause 1(6). It is very simple, and reflects the Inland Revenue rule about the availability of a car for any period of 30 days. If my hon. Friend had gone to the Vote Office and obtained the notes on clauses, he could have informed himself about that and would not have had to ask me.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Further proceedings on the Bill stood postponed, pursuant to Order [3 May].

SOCIAL SECURITY (CONTRIBUTIONS) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Contributions) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

SOCIAL SECURITY (CONTRIBUTIONS) BILL *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Contributions) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums which—

(a) under the Social Security Act 1975 are to be taken as paid towards the cost of the National Health Service in Great Britain; or

(b) under that Act are to be paid out of the National Insurance Fund into the Consolidated Fund in respect of administrative expenses.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Social Security (Contributions) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

CLASS 1A CONTRIBUTIONS

6.55 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 37, at end insert

'; provided that if the person liable to pay the contribution can show that in the tax year the use of the car for the earner's business travel amounted to more than 18,000 miles (or such lower figure as is specified in sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 3 of Schedule 6 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988) and also amounted to more than three quarters of the total use of the car in that year by the earner, or any relative of his (as defined in section 417(4) of that Act), then the cash equivalent of the benefit of the car for that year shall be taken to be £1.'.

The amendment seeks a modest reform to what has been a little intemperately described by Conservative Members as a pettifogging little measure. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) that it is folly to describe a measure that will bring £500 million to the Government as pettifogging and little. The extra revenue that the Government hope to gain from the measure will be welcomed by them and by us. The Opposition and the Government do not differ in their objectives on this issue.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury and other Conservative Members who are in the Chamber have served on the Finance Bill Committee since 1987. They will know that every year when we debate these matters the Government steadily claw back through income tax the advantage to the company car owner. Labour's pre-Budget representations suggested a further move in that direction, although we did not suggest that it should be done by way of the instrument that the Government have chosen—employers' national insurance contributions. However, that method, although different from the one that we propose, is not objectionable to the Opposition and we would not seek to reverse it.

Government policy on this issue over the past four years is broadly right and fair, and is necessitated not only by equity, but by the trading relationships that we have to enjoin with our European partners. In time, pressures by them might have become intolerable if the Government had not moved on this issue. I wonder what would have happened if a Labour Government had travelled in the direction in which this Government have travelled in the past four years.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): There is not much difference.

Mr. Brown: I take that comment as an attack on the hon. Gentleman's own side rather than as a compliment to me. I am always willing to receive compliments from Conservative Members, provided that they are offered in the right spirit.

We wish to proceed in the same direction as the Government on this issue, and although we harbour the fear that if we had had to travel this road at the pace which the Government have chosen, which is right, the Government would not have given us the welcome that we are extending to them. If they were in opposition they would have ensured that the full anger of the automobile industry lobby was directed at the Labour Government. Instead, the Government have to weather that attack themselves. I hope that that remark was not too unworthy of me, but I must also point out that we have always argued for some exemption for those who must have a company car and who do little personal mileage. This will come as no surprise to the Financial Secretary because my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has made the same point, in the context of income tax rather than national insurance contributions, on the past three Finance Bills.

I rather agree with the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith): it is slightly discordant that we should discuss these issues in this forum instead of in Committee on the Finance Bill, but I understand the necessity for that and take no great exception to it.

7 pm

This year I and, I am sure, other hon. Members have received a parliamentary briefing from the CBI which asks:

"Are MPs satisfied that there is sufficient distinction made by the Government between cars used as essential tools of the trade and those given as perks?"

It is clear that some Conservative Members are not satisfied and the purpose of our modest little amendment is to give them some encouragement.

The amendment is specific; it does not leave it open to the Government to make regulations, containing, as it does, the necessary regulations within it. It deals with people who use company cars exclusively on business, not for purposes about which there may be some argument, and who drive them more than 18,000 miles a year—a fairly high mileage. It seems to us likely that such a person would be sick of the sight of the car after 18,000 miles and would not regard any remaining use of it for personal reasons as much of a pleasure. The Minister touched on that point at the end of Second Reading. However, if such a person does not take that attitude, enjoys the use of the car and does a high mileage in it – the Minister referred to an average of 8,000 miles, a figure with which I have no quarrel—of course the car is a perk and the perk element should rightly be taxed.

So we set a threshold. We stipulate that in order for the employer not to be taxed on a company car as an employee's perk it should not be used for private reasons for more than a quarter of the total annual mileage. If someone, therefore, has used a car for more than the 18,000 threshold, we say that he should not have used it for personal reasons for more than about 4,000 miles. That is a clear personal-use threshold beyond which a person's employer would enter the charge bracket.

As the Minister said, a majority may not fall into that category initially, but we think that the pattern might change if the amendment were accepted, and that could be beneficial. People might think again about whether it was advantageous to use a car instead of public transport. They might think again about whether the casual use of the car was really justified. In any event, it is surely right to provide for people who are forced to have a car because of their jobs and who do not enjoy using it much for private purposes.

I realise that the thrust of the legislation is not particularly directed at employees this year; it is intended more as a disincentive to discourage employers from providing company cars in the first place. But our

amendment does not deal with that. It covers circumstances when cars must be given and are not much used for private purposes, and when the Government require the clawback.

I know that there is a scale which the Minister may argue deals with our point, but we think that in the narrow circumstances that we outline—in what is called the "district nurse" case—it would be right to make an exception, and that is the purpose of the amendment.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I shall respond briefly, but I hope equally persuasively, and try to dissuade the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) from pressing his amendment. He said that there was no disagreement between us about the main thrust of the Bill. When he spoke of our travelling in the same direction, I was reminded of the late lamented Iain Macleod who, referring to Enoch Powell, said, "I travel on the same train but I like to get off before the train hits the buffers." There may be something in that.

I am somewhat surprised by the amendment, although it was presented with characteristic good humour by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East. In the Bill, we seek to ensure that cars doing more than 18,000 miles a year which verge on being tools of the trade but which are used for personal reasons for several thousand miles a year, and which are provided free of charge to a private individual, are covered. I emphasise that if a car is provided exclusively for business purposes and no private mileage is run up on it, no charge will arise; but on reflection, the hon. Gentleman may realise that he is going a bit far by suggesting that cars with mileages of more than 18,000—they could still be used for several thousand private miles provided, in effect, by the employer—should be wholly exempt or should make a peppercorn payment, as suggested by the amendment. That would be wrong.

We shall of course keep all this under review once the Bill is implemented, but I cannot advise the Committee to support the amendment because it would enable employers to escape contribution liability even though their employees were allowed to use their cars for quite large private mileages. I believe that employers should pay contributions on this sort of mileage just as if they had remunerated their employees in cash. The charge is reduced by 50 per cent. after 18,000 miles, but to reduce it to a peppercorn would be outwith the spirit of the measure, and I urge the Committee not to accept the amendment.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I was rather hoping for some support from Conservative Back Benchers—perhaps one of the more likely places where I might look for support. I admit that this argument is taking place only at the margins, but, given the comments of some Conservative Back Benchers earlier, I thought that the amendment might find some favour with them.

Having failed to stir up any trouble for the Minister, I suppose that I ought to be grateful for his offer to keep the matter under consideration. This is a new move towards dealing with cars as a perk. This is year one of the approach that the Government are adopting, and I welcome the Minister's promise to return to the matter later if the anomaly with which the amendment deals is shown to be one that needs attention.

I accept the Minister's remarks in the spirit in which they were made, and in those circumstances I can do no other than beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): As my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) has said, this is an extremely complicated clause. It would be helpful if the Minister explained some of its subsections. Subsection (5) inserts into the Social Security Act 1975 new section 4A, subsection (2)(b) of which provides that class 1A contributions are payable by,

"if no such contribution is payable in relation to a relevant payment of earnings in the tax year, the person who would be liable but for subsection (4)(2)(b) above to pay a secondary Class 1 contribution".

The notes on clauses say that that refers to a situation in which

"no payments were due because the earner's earnings were below the lowest earnings limit."

The suggestion there is that the earnings were very low indeed. In fact, the lower earnings limit is about £43 a week.

Mr. Scott: It is £52.

Mr. Smith: Very well, £52. I do not see how the employer of a person earning less than £52 a week would be liable to pay national insurance contributions in respect of a car. Indeed, it would be rather unusual for someone earning such a figure to be provided with a company car. However, those appear to be the circumstances to which this clause refers.

Subsection (8) of the new section 4A says:

"A person shall be liable to pay different Class 1A contributions in respect of different earners, different cars and different tax years."

The notes on clauses say:

"Subsection (8) provides that a person shall be liable to pay different Class 1A contributions in respect of different earners, different cars and different tax years."

The notes on clauses simply repeat the contents of the subsection. That is hardly a helpful way of explaining its meaning. In my view, this subsection is redundant. Surely it is obvious that there will be different contributions, depending on how much people earn, the type of cars they have, and the tax year involved. What is the need for the subsection?

Subsection (9) says:

"Regulations may provide—

(a) for persons to be excepted . . . ;

(b) for reducing Class 1A contributions".

Can my right hon. Friend tell me who will be excepted from the payment of contributions, and in which cases there will be reduced contributions?

Mr. Wilkinson: My right hon. Friend, in reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), who moved the amendment, was elegantly more socialist than the socialists. I should like to refer to the reply of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to a question that I put to her. I asked her to explain in simple language the exact meaning of subsection (6). It has to be remembered that we are passing legislation that must be comprehensible to the ordinary man or woman in the street. Members of the public, unlike Ministers and other Members of Parliament, are not provided with notes on clauses.

Can my right hon. Friend explain why Her Majesty's Government are relying on the age-old formula whereby employees earning more than £8,500 shall incur liability for their companies to national insurance contributions? This applies also to directors. As I pointed out in my Second Reading speech, there are directors who earn very small salaries, if any at all. Often, in the case of a small company, a director's salary is a few hundred or a few thousand pounds—certainly less than £8,500. What is the logic in providing that an employee earning less than £8,500 per annum will not incur for his company liability to national insurance contributions on a company car, but that a director, by virtue of his office, shall incur that liability for his company? I know that the argument is a historic one—previous usage and the system for scale charges. That is the precedent to which we are working, but it makes very little sense, particularly as company directors have the full statutory obligations and the responsibility inherent in their office, whereas employees have not. In my view, there should be some mitigation.

7.15 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I did not intend to take part in this debate, but it occurs to me that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) is quite right to point out that some directors who have company cars may not reach the lower threshold for class 1 contributions. That may well be the answer to the first query of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). What is the position of directors of companies limited by guarantee? Many charities are in that category. What imposition will there be on their directors, particularly if their salaries are below £8,500?

Mr. Scott: I shall seek to address the detailed, but important, points that have been raised.

This is a complicated Bill, but, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has said, we shall conduct wide consultations with employers to ensure that the guidance issued clarifies the whole situation to the greatest possible extent. The figure of £8,500 was chosen for the threshold because it is the same as the Inland Revenue's figure. We are anxious to make sure that the procedures for the collection of these charges are related as closely as possible to those used by the Inland Revenue authorities, so that there will be no further complications for employers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) raised the question of the £8,500 limit. That figure includes not just earnings but any benefits in kind. There has been mention of the position of directors. It would be possible for someone in control of a company so to manipulate the balance of his salary against benefits in kind as to evade proper charges. In this regard, what we propose is realistic and sensible. Full-time working directors, or directors of charities or other such bodies or officers of committees of unincorporated bodies or non-profit-making concerns who are treated as directors will be excluded from the scale charges where they have no personal stake in the operation of the enterprise or organisation. I hope that that will reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman).

In respect of subsection (8), I reiterate that we are anxious to ensure that our arrangements are in most cases identical to those of the Inland Revenue authorities. That is why subsection (8) is there.

The concessions in subsection (9) reflect the extra statutory concessions provided by the Inland Revenue. We are not able to do that on an extra-statutory basis; we are advised that we have to do it by regulation. That is why we are replicating in the regulations that will flow from the Bill the extra-statutory concessions that are provided by the Inland Revenue. Thus, an employee provided with a second car for a family member, typically his or her spouse, faces two scale charges, and the second is increased by 50 per cent. But there are concessions where the family member is also an employee of the company. The rules are fairly complicated and, if it would help, I would be happy to write to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and perhaps place a copy of my reply in the Library, because it is a rather convoluted argument to carry through. This is widely practised by the Inland Revenue and, I think, broadly accepted as a fair practice. I will make sure that those who are interested are made aware of the details.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

7.22 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I hope that Ministers have noted the generous co-operation that has been extended on this measure. I hope that that co-operation will be reciprocated and that a large number of Bills will be dealt with similarly when a Labour Government comes to power. I am sure that that opportunity will arise very shortly. I am thinking in particular of uprating provisions for pensions and child benefit, which I hope will be among the first items placed before the House.

This Bill seeks to redress the imbalance between national insurance contributions on pay and national insurance contributions on the company car, a payment in kind. It is a matter which will require further review and examination by the incoming Labour Government. We will not oppose the measure.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

ENVIRONMENT

Ordered,

That Dr. Kim Howells be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. John Battle be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Dixon, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Rivers (Hampshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

7.23 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I am most grateful to Mr. Speaker for selecting my subject of Hampshire's rivers for the Adjournment debate this evening.

The "compleat angler" can fish all the year round; for someone, somewhere, fish are always in season. But on the chalk streams of Hampshire, it is the coming of mid-May and the hatching of the mayfly that herald the halcyon days ahead. So May is a most appropriate month in which to debate this subject.

Of all the chalk rivers in Hampshire, and probably in the south of England, the Test has long been queen. I am fortunate in having in my constituency its lower reaches, where the salmon join—or perhaps I should say used to join—the trout. Upstream is Stockbridge, the capital of chalk stream dry-fly fishing, mecca for fishermen and headquarters of the famous Houghton club. It should all be a scene of tranquillity, beauty and fishermen's yarns. Instead, the Houghton club is at present ahum with tales that would make Frederick Halford, the father of dry fly fishing, turn in his grave.

One hundred years ago, Halford published his "Dry-fly Fishing in Theory and Practice", in which he said:

"Of all circumstances most usually credited with exercising an influence over an angler's sport, the state of the weather is the predominant one."

We certainly have to thank the weather for having brought to a head the problems and anxieties that have been besetting Hampshire's rivers and fishermen for the last few years. Three unusually dry years, 1988-90, and in particular the March to December period in 1990, which may have been unequalled for dryness since 1921, have literally caused rivers to disappear.

Of the many rivers in Hampshire, it is the chalk streams, the Test, Itchen and Meon, that most vividly illustrate the problems. The Meon in east Hampshire and the Wallop brook and Bourne rivulet, both feeding the River Test, have been suffering from abnormally low flows, because too much water is being taken from boreholes situated in their valleys. Unless something is done urgently to improve water flows, the term "dry fly fishing" may soon take on a whole new meaning.

The Water Act 1989 established the National Rivers Authority and gave it powers to conserve, redistribute or otherwise augment water resources and secure their proper use. The NRA replaced the regional water authorities set up in 1974, which were both judge and jury over the management—or perhaps one should say, mismanagement—of our water resources. The NRA could not have come into being at a more important time, and it responded quickly to the challenges awaiting it on 1 September 1989 when it assumed authority over our rivers.

Far from having the NRA chairman, Lord Crickhowell, in the stocks at Stockbridge for failing to act, I have to admit that we in the Test valley are now applauding him and the NRA for what they are doing, in co-operation with Southern Water, to remedy the situation that faces us.

Last October, the NRA held a forum for interested groups to discuss all aspects of river management. Then, last month, it organised a well attended seminar on its scientific research into the dramatic fall in salmon catches. More NRA research is in hand with the Institute of Freshwater Ecology to see what can be done to stop salmon redds, or spawning grounds, silting up. Last week, another seminar was organised jointly by the British Field Sports Society, of which I am the vice-chairman, and the Salmon and Trout Association.

One can spend a lifetime studying statistics, borehole readings, chemical analyses, flow charts and river reports and still not understand a river as well as its keepers or managers, who for centuries have been conserving these national assets.

The fishing rod is not, as Dr. Samuel Johnson suggested, a stick with a hook on one end and a fool on the other. Fishermen and riparian owners perform a key role in ensuring that river management is at a high standard and flows are maintained. Lord Crickhowell has said that the fisheries are one of the best measures of the health of a river.

Concern over our rivers has also been demonstrated by local residents who have nothing to do with fishing. Last year, the Test valley branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, of which I am proud to be the founder president, invited the NRA to come and speak on the subject of our disappearing rivers, and there was a record attendance.

It is only comparatively recently that increased per capita consumption and, to a lesser extent, population growth have forced engineers to take more water from the chalk, initially without detriment to the ecology; and we are now seeing the first signs that, although rivers are not yet over-abstracted, we may be taking too much water from the wrong places.

When the NRA grants an abstraction licence, it considers whether the water taken will ultimately be removed from the river system and consumed, or will be recycled. Some uses, such as spray irrigation, evaporative cooling or bottling water, are totally consumptive; the water just goes. In the case of inland public water supply, 80 per cent. of the water is returned to the water environment via sewage farms, septic tanks and the like. In coastal areas, waste water goes straight out to sea.

The NRA has made it clear to all abstractors in Hampshire that it will not permit new public water supply or summer consumptive abstraction from the Hampshire chalk. There are no plans at present to revoke existing licences. The NRA usually insists that spray irrigation can be permitted only if the operator can provide a storage reservoir that is filled during the winter heavy rain season. Agriculture is rarely a threat to consumption, because most water is returned via soakaways or controlled discharges to watercourses. The finger of accusation, however, is being pointed at intensive farming near rivers. The banks of Hampshire's rivers used to be bounded by water meadows that acted as a filter. Most of the land is now ploughed to the water's edge. I have even seen some meadows where maize is grown year after year. The intensive use of nitrogen results in more river weed, which further reduces flows and results in rivers silting up. Heavy nitrogen use away from rivers also causes lush growth and thus greater evaporation of water.

The NRA is researching the agricultural problems as part of an appraisal of land use practices in the catchment areas. However, in the meantime, the Government should reconsider the regime for grant aid to farmers in

environmentally sensitive areas, such as the mid-Test. The grants are not adequate to compensate farmers—who are already reeling under other economic pressures—for reducing their agricultural output and thus protecting their water environment.

What is being done to protect Hampshire's rivers? There is a growing public realisation that water is a scarce and precious resource, which should be used wisely in drought years. There is now demand management, and licence monitoring is the rule rather than the exception. We need better leakage control. Some 25 per cent. of water is lost through leaks. We need a charging policy that encourages wise use of water. The CPRE wants national metering of water to be introduced, which could be a starter.

We should restrict development. I am pleased to note that the southern region NRA has an input into SERPLAN—the south-eastern regional plan, but is drawing the Minister's attention to the impact on our water resources of the problems caused by over-development enough? Surely a veto over planning applications would be better.

The flows of rivers could be boosted by pumping water into them from correctly placed boreholes. Leaking riverbeds can be lined. Treated water can be returned to the river, and existing licences can be revoked. If we resorted to the last of those measures to resite boreholes, the NRA would have to compensate the water user for the high cost of developing the alternative source. Who pays? Hampshire has several boreholes that directly affect water flows. One borehole is at Broughton, on the Wallop, a tributary of the Test. One is at Totford, at the source of the Itchen, and there are others close to the Meon and to the Hamble.

Although the NRA has the necessary finance for its many investigations, a question remains over the funding of expensive remedies for confirmed problems under the existing charging or grant-in-aid arrangements. I should like confirmation from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Government will provide the NRA with the money required to carry out essential remedial work that involves licence revocation.

Some costs cannot be borne by the NRA, such as the provision of reservoirs. A reservoir is planned by Southern Water at Totton in my constituency, where the waterworks have supplied most of the additional consumption in the area in recent years. New reservoirs at Totton, which is an ideal place, could store winter river water just before it reaches the sea, but would have no effect on upstream flows or fishing. I hope that the reservoirs will receive planning approval from New Forest district council and from Test Valley borough council. The reservoirs would provide a supplement and would mean that Southern Water would not have to take more water from the river as summer peak demand grows. They would also provide a reserve if pollution occurred in the lower reaches of the Test or in the Solent. I should like the NRA to carry out a study for a national water grid. There may be many problems to overcome, not least finance, and it may be a non-starter for that reason, but it should be investigated.

I have described some of the actions being taken. There are others that, in my view, and in the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), whom I am delighted to see in the Chamber, who, I hope, will join in the debate and through whose constituency the river Test flows, need to be carried out to preserve one of England's most priceless natural resources in the same way, as Lord Crickhowell has said, as

"a great work of art or music"

must be maintained.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's answers. My constituents very much welcomed the visit today to Romsey of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, who answered many questions from my constituents about the Test. I have left it to my hon. Friend to answer my questions this evening. I look forward very much to his answers to my questions, which have as much to do with Mrs. Colvin's washing machine as with trying to catch a trout on a day's fishing. I hope that someone will offer Mr. Speaker such a trout in return for his selecting my subject for this evening's debate.

7.36 pm

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in a debate on a Hampshire matter. I support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said. Like him, I am an interested angler. I am on the councils of the Salmon and Trout Association and of the Anglers Co-operative Association. I am also the chairman of the fisheries committee of the British Field Sports Society. I must declare all those interests, although I am angler first and foremost. Above all, I want rivers to be in a fit condition for fish to live in them and for anglers to fish in them. The sad fact is that, in far too many rivers in Hampshire and elsewhere, those conditions are no longer met. The threat to water levels and to water resources seems to many of us to be getting steadily worse.

I know that many dedicated anglers on the Test and on the Itchen can no longer bring themselves to go fishing because they believe that those rivers are dead. They are full of rainbow trout rather than native brown trout, their levels are low and the amount of weed in the rivers is seriously down. They are not the chalk streams which our fathers and grandfathers knew, and which some of us also knew. The opportunity to dwell on some of the reasons for that change is welcome.

It would be wrong if I left the House with the impression that we are discussing a purely Hampshire problem. From my experience and that of many friends, I know that there are problems with rivers in Berkshire, such as the Pang, with rivers in Kent, such as the Darent and the Stour, with chalk streams in East Anglia and with the West beck in Yorkshire, which is a famous chalk stream where a famous fishing club has been established for many years. There simply is not enough water for fish to live in those rivers. That state of affairs is no credit to the water industry.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside in his tribute to the work of the National Rivers Authority. I know how close an interest the chairman of that authority, Lord Crickhowell, takes in the problem. It was the theme of an effective inaugural lecture that he gave at Fishmongers hall last year, which was well received by everyone who is interested in this important subject.

The NRA and other defenders of our rivers need more help. Some of that assistance must come from the Government in legislative or financial form. There was welcome news in today's newspapers that there is to be a programme to line the beds of 20 chalk streams to prevent

[Mr. Cranley Onslow]

water loss through leakage, although the cost is pretty intimidating. However, the Government can still do more to limit the unnecessary loss of water from our rivers.

An analysis of the figures shows that in Hampshire and elsewhere the total theoretical take-up of the abstraction licences that have already been granted in some cases exceeds the flow of all the rivers in an area. A terrifying quantity could, in theory, be extracted from rivers and boreholes. If that ever happens, we shall have lost the battle entirely. We must study the need to revoke abstraction licences not just for farming, but for other purposes as well.

There is still scope for stricter controls on planning permission relating to the amount of water available in the area concerned. I would like to see regulations if such controls cannot be embodied in the Planning and Compensation Bill currently before the House. There is room in secondary legislation for a stipulation that the NRA must always be consulted by a planning authority which has a major development application before it, whether that be residential or industrial. If the NRA believes that adequate water resources are not likely to be available for that development, that should constitute a veto. I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about that. He may argue that the NRA does not yet have the technical resources to make such judgments. That may be a convincing argument, but it does not mean that the NRA should not be encouraged to develop those resources and, as soon as it gets its act together, it should have the power to exercise such controls over the increased use of water resources.

I also enter a note of caution about water recycling. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside accurately described the damaging effects of spray irrigation. None of the water sprayed on a field ever returns to a river from which it is abstracted. As I suggested to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food earlier today, more attention should be paid to encouraging farmers to impound excess winter rainfall and use that as a source of summer spray irrigation instead of simply pumping the water out of rivers. That practice is all too commonplace in Hampshire and in Devon and there are well-documented examples of rivers being depleted in that way.

Too much reliance is placed on the argument that water abstraction from the bottom of a river can be recycled by being pumped to the top, used and then returned to the river and we must still recognise that that will not be the same natural water as would have entered the river if the boreholes, springs and other sources upon which it had always relied had remained unimpaired. There is a danger in the clever device of recycling water from the bottom of a river to the top which must be explored.

I hope that I have not pressed my point too much in the time available. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) is aware that this is a most important subject and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside for raising the matter this evening. I look forward to a positive response from my hon. Friend the Minister.

7.44 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on raising this important subject for debate. He expressed considerable concern about the River Test, which is important to his constituency. However, as he rightly said, it flows through my constituency first and several of its subsidiaries, such as the Dever and Wallop brook, are important to the environment in my constituency. I saw Wallop brook at Broughton at the weekend and I can confirm—I confirmed it again today by telephone—that it is now at full flood and nearly level with the top of the bank. That is highly satisfactory. However, that apparently highly satisfactory situation conceals the real concern that the aquifers underneath are getting lower year by year.

Last year Wallop brook at Broughton ran dry for the second year running. It has not run dry for two successive years since at least 1921. Although the water level above Broughton was severely constrained which resulted in a good deal of misfortune, the river dried out entirely below Broughton. That was clearly associated with the pumping from the aquifers at Broughton.

The problem is that the water company is pumping within the terms of its licence. It is not even pumping at the maximum amount that the licence permits it to draw from the borehole at Broughton. The water company should draw less water from Broughton and make up the amount by drawing water further down at Horsebridge where it can almost certainly take more water without causing the rivers to dry up.

Who will pay Southern Water to pump more expensive water from that pumping station than from Broughton? There may even be a strong case for laying additional pipelines or reopening disused pipelines between Horsebridge and Broughton to pump water back up to the Broughton source.

It is clear that in many cases licences were granted many years ago—sometimes before the war—and in wholly different circumstances for a given level of abstraction. Abstracting at those levels in current circumstances, with our lower aquifers, produces results different from those expected when the original licences were granted. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the pertinent matters of whether we can revoke or partially revoke licences, who will compensate water companies and where those resources will come from.

I welcome today's announcement in relation to Wallop brook of a combination of partial revocation of licence, the augmentation of river flow and river lining at a cost of £3 million. I am fascinated to know where that money will come from.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister give any news about progress in trying to reduce water loss by leakage? It is about 25 per cent. Most people are thrown back on their haunches when they learn that 25 per cent. of the water that has been abstracted and is being pumped into the water systems of our towns and villages is lost by leakage. Apart from everything else, we need much more research, investment and work in identifying leakages and stopping them much earlier than at present.

7.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) for raising the important subject of vanishing rivers. The whole House will welcome his contribution and those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell). Their contributions have been extremely valuable. The Government appreciate their concerns, as was evidenced by the visit of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to Hampshire only today.

The subject of vanishing rivers is, understandably, hardly far from the news at the moment. Despite some welcome rain in the south-east in the past couple of weeks, there are continuing worries about water shortages this summer. The chalk streams of Hampshire and the south are well known among anglers and there is great concern about their condition, and that concern has been well amplified this evening. In particular, and understandably, there is concern about the steady decline in salmon catches in recent years. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside and other right hon. and hon. Friends have suggested a number of ways in which they believe that water levels in chalk streams can be safeguarded for the future. Before I comment on their suggestions, I hope that it may be of benefit if I say a little about the various issues that are affecting chalk streams generally and in Hampshire in particular. I hope in the process to dispel a few myths.

First, water quality is clearly an important factor in maintaining a river, and particularly in safeguarding its fisheries. The water quality of chalk streams has been, and continues to be, extremely good. The principal rivers, including the Test and Itchen, are all extensively monitored by the National Rivers Authority and are all well within class 1 of the current national river classification scheme—that is, they are of "good" quality —and with an excellent diversity and abundance of species present. The majority of their length is well within class 1a, the top quality class.

As for quantity, rather than quality, it is certainly the case that southern England has experienced a prolonged dry spell over the past three years, and groundwater levels are now well below normal in parts of the south-east and east. Hampshire, however, is not one of those areas worst affected.

The level of a river and the speed at which it is moving are relevant to fisheries. The long hot summer of 1989 is believed to have stimulated the growth of algae, which in turn tend to smother the weeds in a river and increase silt loadings. Those effects, combined with heavy rain the following winter, conspired to scour out much of the weed growth, so that last summer the river flowed over an almost weed-free bed, resulting in low levels, despite the flow holding up reasonably well, but a higher than normal velocity, and thus higher levels of silt.

Hampshire chalk streams do not, as a whole, suffer badly from over-abstraction. Certainly in the Test, the vast majority of abstractions from the river are non-consumptive. That is, the water is "borrowed" and returned, more or less directly, back to the river. Only 2 per cent. of the average flow is consumed after abstraction. Despite some short-term fluctuations, there does not appear to be any long-term trend of increase in either licensed or actual volumes abstracted. However, despite those general comments, the NRA recognises that some localised problems are caused by over-abstraction. I shall say more about that in a moment.

That brings me to the role of the NRA. It will be very grateful for the supportive comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside. The establishment of the NRA has provided an unprecedented opportunity not just in Hampshire but across the whole country for a new and thorough appraisal of the issues affecting the condition of our rivers. The NRA's responsibilities encompass a range of issues—for example, water resources as well as pollution control, and fisheries as well as nature conservation. I have already commented that my hon. Friend has recognised the NRA's work.

We set up the NRA as a tough environmental regulator and there is growing acceptance among those concerned, including environmental bodies that had hitherto been sceptical, that it is succeeding as a tough environmental regulator. Let me outline what the NRA is doing in Hampshire and elsewhere.

First, it has taken action to help Hampshire's salmon fisheries. While most trout fisheries reported an excellent season last year, salmon catches have been declining for some years. Reference has been made to recent local seminars. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside will therefore be aware of the NRA's view that river management appears to hold the answer. Salmon populations are known to depend critically on an adequate supply of clean gravel beds in which to lay their eggs. Historically, riparian owners' keepers regularly raked river gravels to ensure that they were clean, free from silt and ready for the spawning season. That practice has slipped into abeyance in recent years, and that appears to be a major factor in the decline in the fisheries.

The NRA has been seeking to tackle that problem in a number of ways. Research has confirmed that river gravels are not as productive for spawning salmon as might be expected. A programme for mechanically raking gravels is being undertaken and studies are being carried out into sediment movement and into weed growth and management, including the advantages of reinstating programmes of weed cutting in the autumn.

The NRA has also constructed a number of new fish passes on the Test to ensure that incoming salmon can reach their spawning grounds freely. It is taking steps to restock the river with artificially reared local salmon. It has also installed electronic fish counters and radio tagging equipment to study fish movements and spawning behaviour. The NRA is taking a number of positive steps to study causes and to restore the salmon fisheries.

Secondly, while the Test itself is not believed to be suffering from the effects of over-abstraction, there are rivers in Hampshire that are affected. Last year, the NRA identified 20 priority rivers in which low flows were believed to be the result of over-abstraction rather than simply low rainfall, and the NRA thus embarked on a programme of urgent studies. Yesterday, the NRA announced its programme for dealing with the first set of priority rivers. A number of those that have been mentioned are included in that list—for example, Wallop brook, one of the tributaries of the Test near Stockbridge. My hon. Friends have mentioned others, including the Darent and the Pang in Berkshire, as well as a number of other rivers in the south which the NRA has recognised

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

require action. Solutions are now being investigated, including a combination of partial revocation of abstraction licences, augmentation of flows and river bed lining. The NRA is continuing to investigate possible solutions for a further list of rivers suffering detrimental reductions in flows. They include the Bourne rivulet, which is another tributary of the Test, the Meon and the Hamble.

The NRA recognises that where problems caused by over-abstraction exist, there are very rarely any quick or simple solutions. I am, however, impressed by the NRA's determination to get to grips as quickly as possible with such difficulties and I commend the progress that it is making.

Although the NRA has been looking so far at solutions to specific problem cases, we are all alive to the need for longer-term solutions. Abstractions must, of course, be properly managed and the NRA has a full range of powers not only to control the issue of new abstraction licences, but to amend or to revoke any existing licences. My hon. Friends have asked whether the NRA is properly resourced to use those powers. The authority's costs are ultimately recouped from abstractors via abstraction licence charges. To the extent that capital spending is necessary and justified, the NRA has access to initial funding from the abstraction charges scheme. I have no reason to suppose that shortage of capital funds is a constraint on the authority's ability to carry out its functions properly.

Sir David Mitchell: Does that expenditure availability also apply to compensation for reduction of extraction from an existing licence which is reduced?

Mr. Baldry: The costs that the NRA can recoup from abstractors via abstraction licence charges are moneys that can then be used for practical spending. Clearly, there may be occasions when, under its statutory responsibilities, the NRA will have a duty to consider whether it should amend or revoke any existing licences. In such circumstances, compensation is clearly a matter for the NRA. I shall have to take advice on my hon. Friend's specific point about whether it can pay compensation from the abstraction charges scheme. I hope that I shall be able to help my hon. Friend before the end of my speech.

As for its local abstraction policy, I can confirm that the NRA's approach is for major abstractions from Hampshire rivers to be taken from as close as possible to the tidal limit in order to preserve natural flows in the middle and upper reaches. I can also confirm that, certainly for the Test, the NRA does not generally intend to permit new, "consumptive" summer abstractions, requiring instead that sufficient bankside winter storage should be provided together with prescribed minimum flows.

My hon. Friends have referred to the pressures on water resources caused by new developments. The level of development in Hampshire is, in the first instance, a matter for the county council to consider in drawing up its structure plan. I should certainly expect the NRA and local water companies to make an important input into this process so that a proper strategic balance can be struck between development and conservation. The Secretary of State will, of course, need to consider any objections made to the structure plan.

With due respect to my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking, I cannot agree that the NRA should have a veto over planned development proposals. Although careful account must always be taken of the expert advice that is provided by the NRA, the final judgment must be that of the local planning authority.

Mr. Onslow: I should be content with that proposition were it not for the fact that there is absolutely no obligation on the planning authority to take any notice of the input of the NRA. The NRA does not know until very late in the day whether its recommendations have been acceded to and taken seriously. As long as that is the case, I am not persuaded that there is a satisfactory requirement to take the availability of water resources into account. I shall require further evidence, in addition to that which my hon. Friend has been able to give so far, that the need for a veto is not great.

Mr. Baldry: I hear what my hon. Friend says. Clearly, it would sensible if local planning authorities were to take into account the NRA's views when determining planning applications. Any instances or examples where my right hon. Friend feels that the local planning authorities have failed adequately to take into account the NRA's views must clearly be considered. However, I know of no suggestions that local planning authorities have taken planning decisions in disregard of the views that have been put forward by the NRA.

Mr. Onslow: I am sorry to press my hon. Friend on this point, but it is important. If he carries out some research in his Department, it will turn up cases that will show that in more than one instance the advice of the NRA's predecessors about the danger of flooding was not taken into account by the planning authority. Development permission was then granted and the development went ahead, but serious flooding resulted on the developed land. That seems a powerful argument for my case.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend makes the same point in a different way. I do not know of any example of a local planning authority that can be said to have disregarded the advice that was provided by the NRA. Local planning authorities have to take such advice into account, along with a number of other factors, when determining whether to grant a planning application. If my right hon. Friend knows of specific instances where the advice offered by the NRA has not been adequately or sufficiently taken into account by a local planning authority, they will clearly have to be considered as a matter of general policy. However, at the moment local planning authorities take account of the expert advice provided by the NRA. They often have to take into account a number of varying opinions from different bodies, some statutory and some non-statutory, in making a final planning judgment.

Looking ahead more generally, the NRA is developing an overall water resource strategy for the future. It recently published a first report as part of that work, giving a preliminary demand forecast for each of the water supply companies. The NRA has also commissioned consultants to take a fresh look at strategic water supply options, including a national water grid, more inter-regional transfers, and the prospects for desalination. None of those would provide an inexpensive solution. As my hon. Friend conceded, desalination is energy intensive and the plant involved can be highly intrusive. As water is heavy

and bulky, it is seldom economic to transport it over great distances. However, I am sure that the NRA will consider those issues carefully.

Let me reiterate and answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West. The NRA's resources, to which I have already referred, cover instances where it is necessary to buy out licences. As I hope I have confirmed to the House, I do not believe that the shortage of funds is in any way a constraint on the NRA carrying out necessary activities in relation to the problem of vanishing rivers.

Sir David Mitchell: I warmly welcome what my hon. Friend has just said and I am most grateful to him for having answered the question I asked him in the middle of my speech.

Mr. Baldry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend asked about the actions that can be taken to control the consumption of water. It has been rightly pointed out that water is not an infinite resource. I agree completely. Although I am sure that no one would want to constrain the legitimate uses of water, I suspect that we are all guilty at one time or another of careless or wasteful uses and we can all help to conserve supplies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West asked specifically about leakage. Leakage is a problem in all water distribution systems, but it is something to which the water industry is paying ever-increasing attention. The Director-General of Water Services already expects water companies to adopt cost-effective leakage control measures and to minimise charges to customers, and the companies have leakage detection and control programmes designed to minimise losses. For the longer term, the NRA will wish to ensure that leakages are minimised in order to avoid unnecessary abstractions and the development of new resources.

As for charges, there are indications that metering encourages economy and reduces wastage. However, it would be wrong for me to say more, as the director general is currently analysing the responses to a consultation paper on future methods of paying for water and proposes to issue guidelines to the water companies by the end of the year.

Finally, I have been asked about the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, which is, of course, the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. However, I understand that a review of the scheme is already under way and that, if favourable, consultations with farmers and conservation bodies will follow. I have no doubt that the issues that have been raised this evening will be among those that the review will wish to consider.

This debate is most timely and topical, given the attention following yesterday's announcement by the NRA about how it plans to tackle the problem of low flows caused by over-abstraction in certain rivers. Although Hampshire is by no means as badly affected as other parts of the country, I am pleased that the importance of its chalk streams, chalk streams in general and the fisheries they support has been fully recognised by the NRA in the work that it is carrying out. I hope that I have been able to satisfy my right hon. and hon. Friends that the Government and the NRA are taking the issues seriously and that action is being taken to tackle existing problems.

Gravel Extraction (Buckinghamshire)

8.15 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I am extremely grateful to have a chance to take part in one of these highly elusive debates—so elusive that one beat of a Whip's heart or one spoonful too many of watercress soup in the Members' Dining Room, and the moment is passed.

I am particularly glad that the debate will be answered by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), and that my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) is on the Front Bench, because they both share my concern about gravel extraction and all that it involves. They are both neighbours of mine and, although they are constrained in their public utterances by ministerial office, we concert on these matters and I hope to have a sympathetic hearing if only for that reason.

I do not want to be a NIMBY negativist. I want to be positive and constructive, but I must begin by outlining what seems to me to be an unacceptable situation. In huge swathes of north Buckinghamshire people are in danger of having their lives blighted and the countryside is in danger of being irretrievably scarred by the operation of gravel diggers.

Where did we start? It is interesting to look back at a report by Sir Ralph Verney in 1976 which he recalled in a letter published in *The Times* about a year ago. I shall quote from it because it recalls where we started only a few years ago. Sir Ralph Verney wrote:

"the County Council as mineral planning authority should be mindful of the fact that when we planned the building of Milton Keynes, their Committee of which I was Chairman imposed a condition that no permissions should be granted west of the M1 for gravel extractions for the building of the City. This decision was fully endorsed by the London and Home Counties Regional Planning Conference and there was never any question of County quotas for extraction as has been suggested by the developers."

That is where we started a few years ago. Where are we now?

The village of Chackmore in my constituency is a charming quiet village quite close to Buckinghamshire in the environs of the historic grounds of Stowe. It is incredible to believe that an application was put in for gravel extraction within hundreds of yards of that village. It was fought, but it was only after a campaign in the national press that the application was withdrawn. Not everyone has the pulling power, in terms of media interest, of Stowe school, or the support of the National Trust.

The village of Mursley in my constituency—a tranquil and ancient village—is similarly threatened. Once again, there is a proposal to extract gravel on a huge scale within a few hundred yards of the school, which will destroy the environment of the people who live in the village.

Mr. Kenneth Tucker, the leader of a campaign against the threat to Mursley, is not a nimbyist, but a highly energetic and informed man, who takes this matter extremely seriously and looks beyond the confines of his own village. He has pointed out that gravel extraction so close to that village would lead to dust, traffic, noise and danger to the water sources. There would be consequent damage to the environment of neighbouring villages, notably Drayton Parslow.

Those are two examples, but there are more. The villages of Thornton, Beachampton and Thornborough

[Mr. George Walden]

are faced with a similar threat. They lie in an especially picturesque stretch of the Ouse valley. To give an example of the complete insensitivity to landscape with which these applications are made, gravel extraction in that area would run against the convent of Thornton which is a retreat and a teaching centre, and is set in a splendid and isolated landscape, as the nature of the convent requires. That is an example of total insensitivity to the lives of local people, and to the nuns, which can creep into applications for gravel extraction.

It is important to remember that places like the Ouse valley are close to the town of Buckingham and to the larger agglomeration of Milton Keynes. Not only the villagers would suffer; so would the inhabitants of those large towns, for whom that area is one of the closest recreation centres.

Other examples affect my constituents. One is at Finmere, which is over the frontier in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Minister. Another is in the village of Passenham, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry, whom I am glad to see here tonight. Any gravel extraction there could affect the lives of my constituents in Stony Stratford.

A sudden pattern of gravel extraction proposals has developed in north Buckinghamshire in recent years, since Sir Ralph Verney pointed out how damaging it would be if that were to happen, partly as a consequence of the contruction of Milton Keynes.

We seem to be caught in a vice on this matter. We seem to be in a position where we have to despoil the countryside to improve the built environment; we have to blight the lives of rural residents to improve urban areas, housing and roads. We seem to be in a position where people who live in urban areas and who might want to seek a little tranquillity in the countryside at the weekend will find dust, noise and gaping holes in the ground in the villages that I have mentioned. It seems to me to be in everyone's interests to re-examine the whole question of extraction of aggregates and the implications for the environment.

The present arrangements appear to be neat and logical. They depend upon a system which reminds me of some of my experiences in Communist countries where I had the mixed fortune to live at one time. Those arrangements are based upon a quota system and upon rather inflexible national planning. One only has to look at the ugly acronyms associated with the process, such as RAWP and SERAWP, to get the feeling that it is an irresistible process which has lost all touch with the lives of ordinary people.

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows better than I, the arrangements depend on co-operation among the minerals industry, local authorities and representatives of the Department of the Environment. There is the south-east regional aggregate working party, the regional aggregate working party and the national co-ordinating group, which is chaired by the Department of the Environment and comprises working party chairmen, representatives of the aggregates industry and other Government Departments. That all sounds neat and immaculate as a piece of planning machinery, but, in practice, it has become completely divorced from the results on the ground. It is all very well to have RAWP and SERAWP and means of co-ordinating them, but something has gone alarmingly wrong with the whole bureaucratic structure when it ends up in a serious proposal to place a gravel extraction pit next to a school, a convent or Stowe school.

I am not chiding my hon. Friends the Ministers in the Department of the Environment for the situation, as they know, because I have raised the matter in the House before and have had discussions with the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), about it.

The Department of the Environment has been rather forthcoming in reply to my representations. In case it forgets how forthcoming it has been, I shall take this opportunity to remind it.

In his letter of 4 February to me, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South promised to take increasing account of the possibility of alternative sources of aggregates, in other words of slag and such like, rather than digging it from the ground. I also know that the Department of the Environment has spoken to Mr. Peter Smith, an expert on the subject, who happens to live at Chackmore in my constituency—one can see what a wealth of informed and serious people I am fortunate enough to have in my constituency. I am grateful to the Department of the Environment for listening to what Peter Smith has to say.

On the day of my, sadly abortive, Adjournment debate two days ago, the Department of the Environment, I am sure by coincidence, answered a written question on the subject from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg). In that reply, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment spoke of the

"forecasts of the demand for aggregates for the next 20 years"

having

"been prepared by independent consultants."

He went on:

"The Government are publishing the forecasts now so that the environmental implications of the rising demand for aggregates can be fully considered. These are a matter for serious concern. The forecasts do not mean that the demand must be met from new sources of land won aggregates. Nor do they mean that targets are set for production by the minerals industry."

Later, in what was an important statement, the Minister went on:

"The Government will expect the industry to make greater use of alternative sources of supply. These include the potential from marine dredged sand and gravel; the greater use of materials such as china clay, sand and colliery minestone; and the increased exploitation of waste and recycled materials including power station ash, blast furnace slag and crushed concrete. We shall also consider the contributions that can be made from coastal super quarries. The Government have research in hand to examine all these options."

At the conclusion of what was an immaculately drafted reply, the Minister said:

"Mineral planning authorities should have regard to the statement made by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) in July 1989 which made it clear that MPG 6 should be implemented as a matter of priority".—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. *401-2*.]

As we know, MPG 6 is the document that is causing the present problem and under which the applications—I have described them as grotesque—have been made in my constituency.

"The aggregates industry is literally consuming the country."

Those are not my words. I would not use such fiery rhetoric. They are the words of Dr. John Adams of University College, London in a document entitled "Determined to Dig", which was published this month. I hope that the Government will take serious note of that very serious document, because it shows that the problems that my constituents are encountering will be encountered increasingly across the country. Dr. Adams states in that document:

"The principal objective is achieving adequate and steady supplies of aggregates. The second, subordinate, objective is the best balance of the social, environmental and economic costs that must be paid to achieve the first."

He hit the nail on the head there, because that is precisely the imbalance into which we have got ourselves.

Mr. Peter Smith of CAGE—the campaign against gravel extraction—to whom I referred, gets to the heart of what happens to be for me a local problem but which is a much wider national one. After much study of the matter, Mr. Smith believes that the Department of the Environment is in danger of managing the land quarry gravel market to ensure an excess of supply over demand which results in an artificially low price. That is no doubt done with the best of intentions, to support the construction industry, and we appreciate the importance of that industry.

However, Mr. Smith points out that gravel is 40 per cent. cheaper today than it was in 1970. The result is that the low price prevents the use of reprocessed waste materials such as ash aggregates and limestone, which could provide 50 per cent. of aggregate demand. It also inhibits the production of alternatives such as crushed rock and sea gravel. He goes on to point out that the central planning forum for the south-east region is the south-east regional aggregate working party, to which I referred, where delegates from the Department of the Environment, local authorities and gravel companies decide where and how much gravel will be quarried. The costs of that organisation are met from local authority funds. The organisation is, therefore, a private group, and while it meets not exactly in a clandestine situation, its minutes are secret and I understand that ash aggregate manufacturers are not represented on it. I shall be happy to hear the Minister contradict that, but it is my information.

If that is so, it seems odd for a Conservative Government to be operating what is, in effect, a type of price cartel to support a particular industry and to prevent environmental conservation from playing its full part in the decisions that are made. Those may appear to the Minister to be serious charges, but the situation, as Mr. Smith sees it and as I understand it, is serious in environmental terms.

If it were just a matter of gravel and sand extraction, it would be bad enough, but since in this industry one thing leads to another, yesterday's noisy gravel extraction is today's stinking, pestiferous waste pit. I could make a whole speech about the problem of waste pits in my constituency. I have an extremely large one at Calvert, and the local people, notably at Edgcott and Calvert, have lived with that huge pit for years. It takes much of London's rubbish. They have developed a reasonable relationship with Shanks and McEwan Limited, which operates the pit, and historically, basically because of the clay in the area, the pit has been there for a long time.

But whether it is gravel or waste pits, I do not believe in the equality of misery. The fact that many people's lives are already blighted or their environments have been ruined by the existence of gravel pits in south Bucks is no reason to extend gravel pits to north Bucks. Rather, it is a reason to ask what can be done to prevent the suffering that has occurred and damage to the environment being spread northwards or to parts of the country outside my constituency.

The same is true of waste pits. There have been in my constituency, alongside the applications for gravel extraction, a disturbing number of applications recently for waste pits, notably at Bierton, on the outskirts of Aylesbury, which already suffers from a serious traffic problem, which I hope will soon be resolved by a bypass. To impose a waste tip on that area and on its attractive landscape would be an example of vandalism. The proposal has been refused, but is still under appeal. Other attractive villages such as Aston Abbots nearby could be affected.

In yet another part of my constituency, at Great Brickhill, a totally unsuitable application was made to extract sand and fill up the hole with waste. I was glad that when I took up the matter on the Floor of the House and then personally with the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South, he told me in his letter of 4 February that he would examine the possibility of guidance in order to prevent waste pits being established within a certain distance of villages.

We know from the time that such questions occupy on the Floor of the House that the Government are environmentally active. I hope that I have made it clear in my remarks that I appreciate the serious and positive response that I have had so far from the Government. The problem is, quite simply, that, although the Government are moving in the right direction in the longer term, the threat to my constituents and those who live in Mursley, Thornton and Beachampton is immediate. Therefore, I beg my hon. Friend the Minister to take an urgent new look at the situation that threatens to tear up the landscape in my constituency and perhaps in other parts of the country and to blight the lives, not only of my constituents, but of many people throughout the land.

8.42 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): With the leave of the House, I should like to support what my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said about the problems of gravel extraction and to refer to an example that illustrates the case that he is presenting. Conclusions can be drawn from his speech and from the example that I shall give.

In my constituency is the attractive village of Mottisfont. It is close to the River Test and is in an environmentally sensitive area. Therefore, of all the areas where one would expect planning consent for gravel and hoggin extraction, that is one of the least likely. However, a planning application was made, was refused by the local authority, went to appeal and has now been granted. When I objected to that planning application on behalf of many of my constituents, I tried to discover why planning permission was granted in an environmentally sensitive area of substantial beauty, beside one of the foremost environmentally attractive rivers in southern England. The

[Sir David Mitchell]

environmentally sensitive area policy is designed to ensure that the landscape is not damaged by changing farming methods. If the landscape is dug up to create a huge pit, that is the equivalent of changing farming methods, so I presumed that planning permission would be refused in the circumstances that I described. However, when I followed through the council's reasons for granting planning consent, I found that the key reason was the policy of counties being largely self sufficient in the provision of gravel, hoggin, sand and other building materials of that nature. The Government should review that policy urgently.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham gave examples from Buckinghamshire where that policy has had an unsatisfactory effect on his constituents. The case that I described in Mottisfont is highly unsatisfactory to my constituents. It is common sense that, when the Mendip hills have thousands of tons of gravel, hoggin and a perfectly good rail system, there is no logic in continuing the policy of counties being self sufficient in those materials.

Will the Minister look carefully at the principle of requiring a degree of self sufficiency within a council? Would it not make more sense for gravel, hoggin and other construction materials to be brought in from other areas where extraction does not damage the environment and where the rail services are such that it can be done perfectly economically and to the great benefit of the environment in the county that will not be dug up?

8.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): With the leave of the House, may I say that through no fault of his own, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) missed the Adjournment debate in his name on Tuesday, for which I suspect the Chief Whip has much to answer. I was determined that my hon. Friend should have the opportunity to express his concern to the House and that he should have a constructive reply.

My hon. Friend explained his concerns about minerals and waste disposal sites with characteristic eloquence and reasonableness. He knows that I share many of his concerns, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). We have had a number of discussions about concerns on the impact of sand and gravel extraction and landfill sites in Buckinghamshire and adjoining counties. I am pleased to be able to respond to this debate to make it clear that the Government share his concerns about the impact of minerals extraction on the countryside. I am grateful for the opportunity to explain the Government's current thinking.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham is fortunate, as am I, to represent a constituency that contains much attractive countryside. Within his constituency, the county of Buckinghamshire, and in mine, the county of Oxfordshire, and in other counties such as Northamptonshire and Hampshire, there are important mineral resources, particularly of sand and gravel. Because of that, it is not surprising that conflicts arise over the desire to protect the environment.

Those concerns are exemplified by the great many objections which I know have been made to the replacement Buckinghamshire minerals local plan. As my hon. Friend said, that plan is currently being debated at a public local inquiry which has just started. I know that he will appreciate that, against that background, I am unable to comment on the sites that he has mentioned. However, I am confident that the inspector will weigh up all the evidence put to him in a careful and thorough manner before making his recommendations to Buckinghamshire county council, which is the mineral planning authority for the area.

The Government recognise that the environmental impact of the extraction of minerals for construction purposes is a matter of considerable and understandable public concern.

The announcements that we made last week in interim development orders signalled our determination to drive up the standards of the minerals industry. Those old planning permissions cause much public concern, and the amendments that we intend to table for the Planning and Compensation Bill will, first, require IDOs to be registered within six months of commencement of the Bill's provisions, which I expect to be two or three months after Royal Assent. Secondly, in the case of sites dormant for two years before 2 May 1991, they will prevent working from the beginning until the permission has been registered and a scheme of operating and restoration conditions has been submitted and agreed. Thirdly, in respect of working sites—those where working has taken place within the last two years—they will require a scheme of conditions to be submitted for the approval of the mineral planning authority within 12 months of the date of registration. There will be no compensation for the cost of complying with any of those conditions, which will impose far higher environmental standards on the minerals industry than at any previous time in our history.

Those tough new proposals are part of the Government's general approach to environmental questions, following the environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance". The consultation exercise on IDOs shows that there is widespread public concern that the minerals industry does not always operate with sufficient regard for the environment. We take those views very seriously. Nevertheless, I believe that the vast majority of firms operating in the minerals industry have a realistic approach. I believe that they recognise the need for far more stringent environmental standards to be adopted in future, and that the Government's proposals fit naturally into their general context.

My hon. Friend referred to the guidelines, MPG6, which were issued two years ago on the provision for aggregates. We are reviewing this current guidance to ensure that it is up to date and takes full account of the increased environmental concerns.

The first step is the preparation of a long-term forecast of aggregates demand. Demand for aggregates is generated by a proper and natural desire for improvements in the standard of living. That means improvements to our transport infrastructure, especially roads and railways, and improvements in hospitals, housing and water quality. That will be a particularly important factor as we play our part in negotiating and then maintaining rising European Community standards. However, the Government recognise that the environmental consequences of meeting this demand for aggregates must be very carefully

examined and weighed. A forecast of projected long-term levels of demand provides a useful starting point in those considerations.

The forecasts, which were commissioned from independent consultants, were published on Tuesday. They show that, with steady growth in the economy, the demand in England and Wales could grow to between 421 million and 490 million tonnes a year in the next 20 years. That represents an increase in demand of 4 per cent. each year, below the level of growth experienced in the past 40 years. I must stress that the forecasts do not represent Government plans, and are not targets for production which the minerals industry must meet. It is important, therefore, that they should be considered as defining a problem rather than providing a solution.

We regard the environmental implications of the forecasts very seriously, and intend to conduct a full and open debate on the planning and environmental issues they raise. The questions to be considered will include whether the present policy of ensuring a steady supply for the construction industry remains appropriate, as much as the length of time over which guidelines are needed for sensible planning. Before any new guidelines are issued, the Government will want to hear from the industry what practical steps it intends to take to improve its environmental performance and its standing with the public.

We have asked the regional aggregates working parties to consider the medium and long-term implications of the forecasts on their regions. We are seeking their advice on how demand in each region might be met and the extent to which their region can contribute to the requirements of other regions. They will, of course, have full regard to the environmental consequences of increases in the extraction of land-won minerals.

My hon. Friend has mentioned the need to increase the use of materials which are alternatives to primary aggregates. I share that opinion, and the Government made it clear in the environment White Paper that they want to see an increase in the use of waste and recycled materials, including secondary aggregates such as china clay, sand, colliery minestone and slate waste.

We also want increased exploitation of waste and recycled materials, such as power station ash, steel and blast furnace slag and crushed concrete. At present, the use of those materials is less than 10 per cent. of the current production of aggregates. That must increase, and I hope that the industry will show that it can be achieved.

We commissioned research last year to establish the extent of those materials and to identify the steps needed to achieve an increase in their use. We expect the report to be published later this summer. It has already clearly identified that there are considerable stocks of alternative materials which are suitable for use in construction. It has also recommended a number of steps which could be taken to increase their use. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall carefully examine the report during our review of the aggregates guidelines to see what the Government might do to promote the increased use of such materials.

My hon. Friend mentioned the valuable report which Peter Smith has produced. I know that my officials have held useful and interesting discussions with Mr. Smith and I congratulate him on his work.

I should also like to advise my hon. Friend of some other research initiatives which we have commissioned to examine other possible sources of supply. One project, which has just started, is examining the possibilities offered by large-scale coastal quarries, such as that at Glensanda in Scotland. It will examine the potential areas of supply, which include Scotland, and indeed Ireland, Norway and the Iberian peninsula. The consultants will also investigate the environmental and economic consequences of providing aggregates to the south-east from such sources.

My hon. Friend will be aware that marine-dredged sand and gravel are a particularly important source of supply to the south-east of England. We have already undertaken two research projects to identify the extent of the resources that could be available, and we have a continuing programme that will provide a comprehensive view on resources. There are, of course, environmental considerations which affect the extraction of marine material, and I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that those will not be overlooked as we investigate the opportunities offered by that source.

Mr. Walden: I have been extremely heartened by what my hon. Friend has said so far, which seems to put new emphasis on the positive points that the Department of the Environment has already come up with. Will my hon. Friend add one further point? Will he draw to the attention of county councils the fact that, given that the Department of the Environment intends to take what sounds like a radical look at the current position, they should not rush into granting planning permission for quarries which could go ahead and perhaps slip from the net of a new and perhaps more positive review?

Mr. Baldry: As I made clear in the introduction to my comments, I fully appreciate and share my hon. Friend's concerns. No doubt he appreciates that county councils, as mineral planning authorities, have to have regard to the guidance which they are given and, in determining applications, have to balance the conflicts which arise, understandably, over the need on the one hand to extract sand and gravel and the desire on the other to protect the environment.

It is of course important that there should be careful use of aggregates and that there should not be over-specification in construction use. We have started further research, which will examine the specification of aggregates used in construction to see if action needs to be taken to help eliminate any unnecessary or excessive use of this valuable natural resource.

The Government recognise that it is essential to continue to raise the environmental standards in the minerals industry. That is why we commissioned Groundwork last year to undertake a study of the environmental performance of the industry. The report was recently published, and a copy is in the Library. It has made a number of recommendations on the steps which the industry could and should take to achieve higher standards.

These include the implementation of a system of corporate environmental management, including site appraisals, regular monitoring of performance and periodic environmental audits. It is particularly important that all employees in the minerals companies should realise that they have a responsibility for the environment in which they operate. Companies must recognise that they need to act as good neighbours; I am sure the Groundwork report will be invaluable as they work towards this end.

[Mr. Baldry]

As part of our overall approach to drive up standards, we intend to follow up the Groundwork study with a pilot initiative in two counties close to my hon. Friend's constituency—Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. With funding from my Department, Groundwork will be able to visit a number of current operational sites and recommend the steps which the company in question should take to improve the site concerned.

We are also conducting other research initiatives which will lead to higher operating standards at minerals sites, and we shall shortly be issuing draft guidance on noise, a matter which my hon. Friend is rightly concerned about.

As my hon. Friend and the House will recognise, the current public local inquiry in Buckinghamshire has prevented me from saying more about Buckinghamshire itself. My hon. Friend made his own points in his own way, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), and they can be assured that they will be listened to carefully. However, I hope that I have been able to demonstrate beyond any doubt that we understand the widespread public concern about minerals extraction. We are determined that the minerals industry will in future operate in an environmentally responsible manner. The adoption of high standards is in the interest of operators themselves. We shall certainly take very careful note of the points which my hon. Friend has made as we review the aggregates guidelines.

The review will be conducted in an open and public manner. We shall welcome views on the forecast and the implications for the environment, and these will be taken into account as draft guidance is prepared. There will be a full public consultation exercise on the draft guidelines in due course.

I hope that my hon. Friends will recognise that we take these issues extremely seriously. I welcome the opportunity of being able to comment to the House on the progress that we are making.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 10 May 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Badgers Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF S. 2 OF BADGERS ACT 1973

9.37 am

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 11, at end insert 'or'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, leave out line 12.

No. 3, in line 14, at beginning insert

'in a manner which causes harm, or would be likely to cause harm, to a badger,'.

No. 4, in line 16, at end insert—

'(4) An accused shall not be permitted to rebut a presumption of guilt established under sections 1(1A) or 2(2) by evidence that he was engaged in any other activity save where he can show that he was authorised to be engaged in that activity by the occupier of the land on which the alleged offence occurred.

(5) A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 2(3)(e) (disturbing a badger) by reason of entering a terrier into a badger sett provided that his action would otherwise have been lawful.'.

No. 5, in clause 2, line 25, leave out '(a), (c) or (e)'.

No. 16, in clause 4, page 2, leave out lines 47 and 48.

No. 18, in clause 5, page 3, line 13, at end insert '"harm" means bodily harm.'.

Mr. Colvin: This group of amendments is crucial to the Bill. Those Conservative Members who had reservations about the previous Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) are pleased to have the opportunity to support this Bill. The House will agree that there has been a different atmosphere surrounding this Bill from the start, largely to the credit of the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), who has been only too ready to have discussions with those of us who expressed genuine concerns and reservations about the Bill that the House considered during the last Session. There has been much consultation and compromise.

As the House will know, it is the nature of private Member's Bills that, unless such an atmosphere prevails, the chances are that a Bill will not make the progress that its promoter would like. I am afraid that that is what befell the previous Bill on the subject. Unfortunately, almost with the same breath as he proposed his Badger Protection Bill, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West proposed another Bill to ban fox hunting. That led one or two of us with an interest in field sports, who support the legitimate interests of those who go about their business in the countryside, whether they be field sportsmen, farmers, landowners or foresters, to be slightly suspicious about the hon. Gentleman's real objectives.

There is no doubt about the objectives of the hon. Member for Newport, East. All of us in the House and the many constituents who have written to us on the subject have no doubt that his objective is to see the end of the obnoxious practice of badger digging and baiting. We are in total agreement about that. Any other side effect of this measure can be hotly debated, but the principal objective must remain.

I shall concentrate first on amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 4. As several hon. Members attending this debate have not been present at earlier debates on badgers, either in this Session or the previous one, I shall begin with a few general remarks about the problem as it is seen inside and outside Parliament. The Bill creates a new offence of recklessly or intentionally causing a dog to enter a badger sett and is designed to make it easier to prosecute badger diggers—something we all want to stop.

At present, it is an offence under section 1(1) of the Badgers Act 1973 to attempt to kill, injure or take a badger. Since 1985, when the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was amended, the burden of proof has been reversed, so that a person who enters a terrier into a badger sett is presumed to have been attempting to kill, injure or take a badger, unless he shows to the contrary—unless he shows that he is digging for foxes.

It is argued that, despite the tightening of the law in 1985, badger diggers are still evading conviction by taking fox carcases with them, so that they can claim that they were after foxes, not badgers. On the other side, it is argued that there are many legitimate terrier men who are truly after foxes and who have fallen foul of the law because they have been unable to prove their innocence —that happens a great deal in Wales.

There is general agreement that the law is unsatisfactory and results in lengthy proceedings, with expert witnesses called on both sides. However, although a simple offence of causing a dog to enter a badger sett would make it easier to prosecute badger diggers, it would also put an end to the control of foxes by using terriers in setts. Foxes frequently run into, or occupy, badger setts. Therefore, the new offence would be unacceptable to the sheep farming community.

The legitimate use of terriers by packs of fox hounds and others to control foxes does not harm badgers. If farmers were denied that method of control, alternative methods such as snaring and night shooting are likely to cause far more trouble for the badger, which is essentially a nocturnal animal. At present, packs of fox hounds and other above-board fox control operations do not fall foul of the law when using terriers in setts, as they are plainly not attempting to kill, injure or take badgers.

The offence, as drafted, makes no allowance for someone who genuinely wishes to take foxes out of badger setts. That is of particular concern, as the Bill presently defines "sett" to include disused setts. However, a simple defence allowing the use of terriers for fox control would not be acceptable, as it would open the loophole for badger diggers to claim that they were after foxes. Therefore, we must find a means of distinguishing between legitimate terrier men and badger diggers.

[Mr. Colvin]

A licensing system has been suggested, but that would be unnecessarily bureaucratic. A large number of licences would be needed—the figure would run into thousands—and it would be hard for the licensing authority, whatever it might be, to determine whether an application was genuine. A licensing system is likely to be resisted by the Government—perhaps the Minister will comment on that later.

Amendment Nos. 1, 2 and 4 provide a more simple means of permitting legitimate terrier work. It is accepted that almost all badger diggers are trespassers, but farmers or huntsmen who genuinely wish to control foxes are not. The amendments remove the right of defendants charged under sections 1 or 2 of the Badgers Act 1973 to claim that they were after foxes or engaged in any other activity, unless they can show that they were authorised to be engaged in that activity by the occupier of the land in question.

A person caught entering a terrier into a sett would face near certain conviction if he were trespassing, so it is far easier to prosecute someone for that offence. Even if authorised to be there by the occupier, the person would still, as at present, have to prove that he was after foxes, not badgers. Therefore, the amendments delete the simple offence of causing a dog to enter a badger sett.

9.45 am

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): My hon. Friend talks about the difficulty of licensing. However, clause 3 extends the exceptions so that a person will not be found guilty if he is carrying out work on land "with the consent of the landowner and is authorised by a Hunt recognised by the Masters of Fox Hounds Association". Is that not likely to give rise to some difficulties, because the Masters of Fox Hounds Association is, on the whole, regarded as the establishment organisation? There is nothing wrong with that, but there are quite a large number of perfectly legitimate Welsh packs of fox hounds which, for various reasons, are not authorised—some of them do not like to belong to an establishment organisation. It seems that perfectly legitimate organisations might be excluded by the creation of what I suppose is a closed shop organised by the Masters of Fox Hounds Association.

Mr. Colvin: I am interested to hear my hon. Friend's intervention, but a later amendment addresses that issue in some detail.

There is no doubt that a licensing system would be unnecessarily bureaucratic to administer. We should have reservations about the possibility of the wrong organisation being asked to carry out the licensing. If it were to be the Ministry of Agriculture, perhaps that would be all right, but a local authority might well be given the job. When we consider the political complexion of local government in some districts, we can see that, if a local authority were to issue licences, that might cause difficulties.

Mr. Budgen: I agree that it seems that there will be difficulties, no matter which organisation is given the duty of issuing licences. My hon. Friend spoke of the possibility of local authorities having a particular political view about a lawful activity. There is also a risk that a private organisation might carry out its licensing duties negligently or idly, which would create all sorts of difficulties. The Masters of Fox Hounds Association carries out its duties very well, but a significant minority of legitimate hunts do not belong to that association, and difficulties could arise.

Mr. Colvin: I absolutely understand my hon. Friend's point, but if he is still in the Chamber later, he will find that that issue is addressed in more detail in other amendments.

Amendment Nos. 1, 2 and 4 delete the simple offence of causing a dog to enter a badger sett. They also qualify the offence of disturbing a badger in a sett so that a disturbance is permitted if it occurs as a result of the otherwise lawful use of terriers in setts. That is necessary as, otherwise, someone could be prosecuted for disturbing a badger, however minimally—the level of disturbance is not quantified—by entering a terrier into a sett, even where that action was part of a legitimate fox control operation.

Amendment No. 5 involves the defence provided in clause 2(2), which was amended in Committee. It permits certain interferences with setts where the action is

"the intentional result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably have been avoided."

In essence, that would allow unavoidable acts that interfered with setts; but the defence recognises only incidental damage, obstruction or disturbance of a badger in a sett. For some reason, the unavoidable entry of a dog into a sett or the unavoidable destruction of a sett will in no circumstances be permitted. Obviously, those behind this Bill regard the offences of entering a terrier into a sett or of the destruction of a sett as so heinous that no defence may be permitted. That is unfair, and also probably wrong in law. *[Interruption.]*

The Bill creates serious offences with heavy penalties. For the sake of equity, proper and even-handed defences must be allowed—I am sure that the promoter of the Bill agrees with that. Amendment No. 5 alters the defence in clause 2(2) so that it is available for all offences of interfering with a sett—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I am finding it difficult to follow the hon. Gentleman's remarks with so many conversations going on.

Mr. Colvin: I should like to raise one other point with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So many amendments are grouped in this first group that it will be difficult for those who want to comment on them and question them to be given answers on each amendment in turn, either by me or by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). Would it therefore be for the convenience of the House if I concluded my remarks now and spoke later on amendments Nos. 3 and 15?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On Report, the rules of order allow hon. Members to speak once only unless they move the amendment in question.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth) *rose*——

Mr. Colvin: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hardy: My anxiety about amendments Nos. 4 and 5 arises because of the following problem. I recognise that dogs cannot read law and that, if a dog illegally chases a rabbit, it is no good reading out the statute to it. On the other hand, if this amendment is inserted in the Bill, there is a danger that the badger digger will say that he was walking lawfully in the countryside when his dog

inadvertently entered a badger sett. He could use that loophole to excuse badger digging every weekend for another 20 years, while a succession of his dogs sometimes got lost down badger setts.

No one wants to persecute an innocent citizen whose little dog inadvertently enters a badger sett, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a real difference between that innocent citizen and the thugs who perpetrate an activity which I hope the hon. Gentleman deplores as much as I do? He should not try to amend the Bill so as to provide such a wide loophole that would give the villains a field day.

Mr. Colvin: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's concern is shared by myself and by the House. The whole object of the Bill is to close loopholes, but in doing that we must not make the legislation so onerous as to prevent perfectly legitimate activities. If the hon. Gentleman was listening carefully to me, he will know that the permission of the occupier or the owner of the land is necessary in cases of so-called interference with setts. The example that the hon. Gentleman offers, of an ordinary walker whose dog goes down a sett, could not work as a defence for badger diggers in a court.

For a start, if the digger had no legitimate right to be on the land, he would be trespassing, because he would be doing damage and would therefore be liable to the laws of trespass. Once the Bill, if amended as I would like it to be, is in force—we should remember that badger diggers are probably mainly townspeople who have no respect for country life—the defences and how the law stands will eventually become generally known.

The purpose of amendments Nos. 3 and 18 is to ensure that interference with setts which is not harmful to badgers does not become a criminal offence. The prosecution would have to prove that the interference was likely to cause bodily harm to a badger. The protection that the Bill gives badger setts would be unlimited, in the sense that any reckless or intentional interference, however slight, would be an offence—for instance, any disturbance to a badger when occupying a sett, however trivial, would be an offence.

The National Federation of Badger Groups has suggested that this provision could be used to prevent people from playing war games in a wood in a way that disturbed badgers, or that it could prevent the leaving of sacks in the proximity of setts. The Bill does not specify that any disturbance must be serious or harmful to badgers. While we may disapprove of playing war games or the leaving of sacks near setts, those are hardly matters that should become serious criminal offences. It is extremely worrying to learn that there are people who would be prepared to use the wide provisions of the Bill to prosecute others engaged in such harmless activities.

No harmful interference with setts occurs in farming operations or during hunting when setts are temporarily stopped or blocked or when hounds temporarily mark—which means indicating the present of a fox at an entrance. The amendments would permit such activities provided that they were not likely to harm badgers.

Although the amendments would allow the destruction of setts if no harm was likely to be caused to badgers as a result, it must be remembered that only setts showing signs of likely occupation and use are protected in any case. A person who destroyed an occupied sett would find it difficult to claim that there was no likelihood of harm to badgers.

The amendments would allow farming activities that disturbed badgers or slightly damaged setts, provided there was no likelihood of harm to badgers. The National Federation of Badger Groups has drawn attention to the impact of the Bill on non-harmful farming operations. It says of farmers who annually plough over the entrances of sett tunnels near the edges of fields neither intending nor causing harm to the badgers, which probably reopen the holes:

"this is known to several of our member groups who have contacted us to ask to ensure that such farmers, who are badger-friendly, are not placed at risk by the new provision."

As it stands, the Bill would lead to badger-friendly farmers committing criminal offences—damaging setts and disturbing badgers. The defence provided in clause 2(2) would be of no help because, unless a farmer was unaware of the presence of the setts, he could have avoided ploughing over them. It is precisely that sort of innocent activity that should be protected. I believe that the promoter of the Bill accepts that. The amendment ensures that harmful farming operations such as the wholesale flattening of occupied setts would not be permitted. I end with the hope that other hon. Members will take part in the debate and support some of my propositions.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): I entirely concur with what my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) has just said, but I want to refer to amendment No. 16, to clause 4. It concerns the use of dogs, especially terriers, but in a different context from that dealt with by the amendments to clause 1.

Clause 4 is about the granting of licences and the type of licence that may be made available for the removal of badgers in certain circumstances. For example, they can be removed for agricultural operations, for town and country planning or for the maintenance or improvement of a water course. However, lines 47 and 48 on page 2 refer specifically to the fact that dogs may not be used, even under a licensing system, for entry into a badger sett. That appears to be a natural corollary to clause 1, but in clause 4 the lack of the ability to grant a licence allowing a dog to enter a badger sett is a disadvantage to farmers and possibly to badgers, hence my amendment No. 16.

10 am

The National Farmers Union is anxious that fox destruction societies should be able to continue to enter dogs into badger setts where authorised to do so by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I suspect that the issue of such licences would be fairly rare, but the control of foxes by organised clearances involving dogs in certain parts of the country, and especially in Wales, is very necessary.

I understand that it is quite common in Wales for small groups of perhaps three or four farmers between them to own three or four foxhounds which are used in the open countryside to raise foxes and chase them, so that they go to ground in a foxhole or badger sett. No doubt Welsh Members with more experience of that matter will speak about it. Such foxhounds are not used in any sporting sense but purely to control foxes.

Having chased the fox into the earth, or perhaps into a badger sett, it is necessary for farmers to continue to have the ability to control it. Without the authority to use dogs,

specifically terriers, under licence, the objectives of such minifox hunts cannot be achieved. That is why I tabled amendment No. 16.

Secondly, before I received the representation from the NFU, it occurred to me that when a licence is granted for the removal or destruction of a badger sett, it is essential to ensure that no badger or any other animal remains in the sett. In the case of a large sett, I am not sure how one would determine that except by putting in terriers to push out the badger or other animal that may be there. As hon. Members know, some badger setts have existed for centuries and are gigantic. I hope that the House will accept amendment No. 16, or that it will be possible to vote on it separately if need be.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I support amendment No. 16 to which the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) has just spoken. In my constituency, it is clear that farmers hate badger baiters. There is no curse on the farm worse than the trespasser and no greater curse than the trespasser who is a badger baiter. I have been told about a recent incident in Montgomeryshire, in which a farmer who caught some badger baiters was petrified with fear: he would not go to the police, because the badger baiters threatened harm to himself and his family, and threatened him with firearms. Those badger baiters were not from Montgomeryshire; such people are never country people. I regret to say that they had clear Merseyside accents and had started to dig for badgers in order to pursue their vile sport when they had transported the badgers to wherever they were taking them.

Those of us who care for badgers, such as the farmers of Montgomeryshire, think that it is extremely important for a proper balance to be preserved between badgers, foxes, dogs which roam the countryside, and people. It is crucial to remember the people.

Farmers are keen to preserve and look after badger setts. I know many farmers who are proud to take me to badger setts on their farms. They must also be allowed to carry out their legitimate activities in the countryside, and the most legitimate of those activities is sheep farming. Whatever industries have been brought to my constituency, it still depends on the major industry of Wales, which is sheep farming. If there were no sheep in the hills, there would be no people there either. Farming is already in enough financial trouble for one reason or another, without creating more problems.

It is somewhat difficult to obtain accurate figures about what is happening to foxes in rural Wales. However, I suggest that the threat posed to lambs by foxes is as great as that posed by uncontrolled dogs. I have obtained figures from the huntsman of the David Davies hunt in Llandinam in mid Wales. As some hon. Members know, that hunt is extremely well respected, and Mr. David Jones, the huntsman, is given the regard that such experienced huntsmen receive in the countryside.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: I shall give way when I have concluded this point.

In the lambing season, which recently ended, Mr. Jones was called out many times. For example, he was called three times to the farm of Mr. Newey at Tynymaen, Llandinam, where 22 lambs were lost to foxes. He was called four times to the farm of Mr. Williams at Dolhafren, Caersws, where 27 lambs were lost to foxes.

He was called out twice to the farm of Mr. Higgs at Cefnllydan, Tregynon. Mr. Higgs is the chairman of the Llanidloes branch of the National Farmers Union and a moderate and highly intelligent farmer. Twenty-five lambs were lost to foxes there. He was called out four times to Mr. Trow at Llandinam hall, Llandinam, where 27 lambs were lost to foxes. Mr. Jones was called out often and took 46 foxes during the season, of which 28 were removed from badger setts. This is all clear evidence of the problem.

Mr. Jones and others like him control the problem of foxes with minimal damage to the badgers. Mr. Jones does not want to hurt badgers. Control of foxes in the way that it has been done in the countryside of Montgomeryshire for a long time is done humanely—the foxes are shot when they are caught—and with rigour and accuracy.

Mr. Colvin: What the hon. and learned Member has been saying is important, because it proves that fox hunting is a legitimate business carried out to control foxes. He has described a working hunt, as most are. They are not a collection of toffs in top hats out to enjoy themselves spoiling the countryside.

Mr. Carlile: I cannot contradict what the hon. Gentleman says, although I have never been fox hunting. I speak as someone who has no desire to go fox hunting, but I know that most of the hunting of foxes in my constituency is not done by toffs in top hats. Not many people there could afford the top hat, let alone the rest of the uniform or the horse. It is done to control foxes. It is generally done by—I hope that they will forgive me for saying so—ordinary farmers with a small number of terriers, over a restricted area.

We do the badger no service by preventing such hunts from continuing. I have to say, with much regret but realism, that there is a real danger of such fox hunting being driven underground and farmers feeling driven to disobey the law because the law does not meet their legitimate needs and aspirations. I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies)—I apologise for taking so long to do so.

Mr. Ron Davies: I understand the difficulty for the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I am grateful to him for giving way. I should like to understand the totality of his argument, so perhaps he could clarify an apparent inconsistency in his position. He spoke glowingly of the David Davies hunt at Llandinam. However, I understand that it is official Liberal party policy to ban fox hunting. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman's endorsement of the Llandinam hunt extend to Liberal party policy generally?

Mr. Carlile: If the hon. Gentleman had read what he ought to have read, he would know that it has always been the policy of the parliamentary Liberal party, the parliamentary alliance and the parliamentary Liberal Democrats that this is an issue of conscience. This is a private Members' day, on which hon. Members express their own views. I am expressing my view, conscientiously. The hon. Member is right to say that my party has passed a motion calling for the banning of fox hunting, but he should bear in mind the fact that my party has always

recognised, and endorsed, the parliamentary party's view that this is a matter of conscience. Perhaps we can get back to the merits of the issue.

Mr. Ron Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No, I will not give way again. I do not want to turn the debate into a political one. It is disgraceful to try to do so. I am trying to help to strike a balance between the needs of the farmers in my constituency, whose interests I have described, and the important needs to protect the badger. If amendment No. 16 is not carried, the Bill will be detrimental to the interests of the badger. It would be nonsense to suggest that any farmer would deliberately flout the law, but when his livelihood is under threat and his lambs are being killed by foxes, and the law has removed from him the instrument of protection, he will find it difficult to understand what else he can do.

I strongly applaud the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for promoting the Bill. It is desirable that we should do whatever we can to protect badgers further. However, we must do so in a way that balances the interests of the badgers, the danger from the foxes and the needs of the people who live in rural areas such as I represent. For that reason, I support amendment No. 16.

10.15 am

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): The purpose of the Bill is to correct an omission from the Badgers Act 1973 so as to give protection to the home of a badger as well as to the badger itself. The clear duty of those of us here this morning who support the Bill—I am certainly one of them—is to resist any amendment that would weaken the shape of the Bill so much that it would become ineffective, and to support responsible amendments that improve the Bill and reflect, and protect, the genuine interests of farmers where they are not in conflict with the aims of the Bill.

The amendments in this group fall into two categories. The first are those moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and the second is that tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). The second, spoken to so articulately by my hon. Friend, reflects the clear view of the NFU that, without such amendment, the work of the farming community would be seriously hampered and the control of foxes as a pest would be made difficult, if not impossible. For that reason alone, I hope that the House will accept amendment No. 16. I believe that it would not have a detrimental effect on the prime purpose of the Bill.

However, I cannot accept the first group of amendments, moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside. These, and other amendments that we shall discuss later, would have a detrimental effect on the shape of the Bill to the point where it would become virtually worthless. That would be a great opportunity lost for the House to set right an omission from an earlier Act.

I hope that, when he responds to the debate, my hon. Friend will clarify the sentiment behind one of his amendments. The League Against Cruel Sports, in a brief sent to Members of Parliament, says—wholly incorrectly—that one of the amendments would create

"a criminal offence ONLY if it could be shown that the interference was 'likely to cause bodily harm' to a badger."

That is not what the amendment says, and we must be clear about that and deal with fact rather than emotion. The amendment says that an offence would be created if an incident were conducted

"in a manner which causes harm, or would be likely to cause harm, to a badger."

If I disagree with the inaccuracy in the brief from the League Against Cruel Sports, I still concur with the sentiment that it is expressing. The badger is a nocturnal animal and therefore leaves its sett to hunt at night. If the amendments were passed, the unscrupulous would be able to block a badger's sett while it was out hunting, and it would therefore be unable to return to its lawful home. Does my hon. Friend regard the deprival of the lawful home of the badger as being harmful? It seems that the amendments present us with a series of quibbles and that they are designed to create a loophole in the Bill. I should find it impossible to support any amendment that would weaken the Bill and I hope, therefore, that the House will reject the amendments that would have that effect.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I shall speak to amendment No. 16 and take up the remarks of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). I accept the seriousness of the anecdotal evidence of the killing of lambs by foxes.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The evidence is not anecdotal.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It is. Where is the hard evidence?

Mr. O'Hara: The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery presented a series of anecdotes—I accept the seriousness of his anecdotal evidence—concerning the killing of lambs by foxes. The source of that evidence could not be regarded as impartial.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that my figures are inaccurate? If he is, I challenge him to make that statement outside the House. It is my view that the figures are accurate. Irrespective of whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with the conclusions which I drew from them, it is disgraceful to suggest that there is some dishonesty behind the figures. They are the figures of the person who went and took the foxes. That man spoke to the farmers and took the dead lambs. What more accurate evidence does the hon. Gentleman expect than that?

Mr. O'Hara: I was not casting any doubt on the accuracy of the statistics, nor was I casting any aspersion on the honesty of the providers of the statistics. I was simply saying—it is a matter of fact—that the statistics were anecdotal. I wish to set against that anecdotal evidence—I accept that the statistics that the hon. and learned Gentleman quoted are serious for the individual farmers who provided them—some evidence that is more scientific.

There have been studies of the activities of foxes, including the killing of lambs, in areas such as those to which the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery referred. I start with a publication that was produced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It was produced, I accept, in 1979 but I have more up-to-date evidence. The MAFF survey of farmers' estimates of lamb losses in three predominantly sheep-rearing counties in mid-Wales yielded the figure of 0·5 per cent. loss to foxes. More recently, in 1985, the MAFF reference book 255(83)—"Research and Development Report on Mammal and Bird Pests'—stated:

[Mr. O'Hara]

"In a study carried out in an upland hill area of Powys stocked with 3,500 lambing ewes, Lamb losses were found to be unaffected by foxes present in the area."

More recent MAFF studies in Northern Ireland and Scotland have produced the similar conclusion that, although lamb mortality may reach more than 20 per cent. in upland areas, most of that is due to stillbirths, malnutrition and hypothermia. All studies show that fox predation accounts for only between 0·5 and 2 per cent. of the mortality.

Mr. Hardy: The information that my hon. Friend is giving to the House is sufficiently serious and sufficiently soundly based and in sufficient conflict with the scale of the evidence quoted by the hon and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) that it may be that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree that my hon. Friend is doing the House a service, and that following his comments it would probably be useful if hon. Members who are now in the Chamber and who are members of the Select Committee on Agriculture were to embark on a study to establish the facts, given the enormous discrepancy between the evidence produced by the hon. and learned Gentleman and that which has been presented by my hon. Friend. I have formed the view that the hon. and learned Gentleman may have eaten far more sheep than the foxes have done in his constituency.

Mr. O'Hara: My hon. Friend has made a most useful suggestion.

I have one more piece of scientific evidence to present. The report is very recent—October 1990—and it emanated from Aberdeen university. It suggests that the persecution and killing of foxes has no impact on either fox numbers or lamb numbers. Given the discrepancy between the evidence produced by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and that which I have put before the House, I commend the useful suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy).

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Is the hon. Gentleman referring to the work that has been done on the Eriboll estate in Sutherland in taking up the findings of the survey that was undertaken by Aberdeen university?

Mr. O'Hara: I believe so.

Mr. Soames: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is familiar with that research in any depth. Is he aware that the Eriboll estate is a unique part of the United Kingdom in terms of its landscape and the way in which the wildlife would be distributed on it? The author of the research has made it plain that it is impossible to extrapolate from the survey that was undertaken at the Eriboll estate any further conclusions for anywhere else within the United Kingdom. It is one of the great wild areas left in the United Kingdom. The key finding of the survey—this comes as no great pleasure to any of us—is that foxes do take and kill viable lambs.

Mr. O'Hara: Whatever the merits of the evidence, it is one example of the scientific studies to which I have referred. It reinforces the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth that there is room for a close investigation of the matter to be carried out by a Committee of this place.

If there are pockets of serious predation by foxes upon lambs as described by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, I suggest that the provisions in clause 2 provide adequate means for coping with such instances as they arise. If the Welsh fox hunters are as concerned as the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests to play their part in coping with the problem, the provisions for the temporary stopping of setts will provide an adequate remedy.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): Unfortunately, I was unable to remain in the Chamber for the whole of the debate on Second Reading, but I listened to the opening speeches. I take this opportunity to say that, along with all other hon. Members, I abhor the evil practices of badger digging and badger baiting.

In reading the report of the Second Reading debate, my attention focused on comments made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office. She reminded the House that the Protection of Animals Act 1911 forbids the fighting or baiting of any animal, and said that the maximum penalty for that offence has recently been increased to £5,000. She then referred to the Badgers Act 1973, which similarly provides for a maximum fine of £5,000. Thirdly, she referred to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which provides for a level 5 fine. My right hon. Friend said that the badger is an unendangered species and therefore it already enjoys unique protection in the countryside.

I understand that the purpose of the Bill is to make it easier to prosecute those evil people who engage in badger baiting. That is a most eminent purpose, and one which I strongly support. However, the number of instances where it appears likely that the Bill, when enacted, will be used for successful prosecution is very small indeed. The reality of the countryside is such that the majority of farmers know what is happening on their land. I support the view of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) that farmers, who understand the countryside and love the animals with which they work and the wildlife that surrounds them, will do everything in their power to prohibit badger digging on their land.

10.30 am

My interest in the Bill is confined to agriculture. The farmers have no option but to use their land as their factories; it is where they earn their living. This is not a unique Bill, because other legislation already affects the right of a man to do what he will with his land. However, it would impose a new and serious burden on farmers in the use of their land. I tabled an amendment, which unfortunately did not attract Mr. Speaker's attention, to make it possible for farmers who, in their agricultural operations, destroyed a badger sett not to be prosecuted under the Bill. I realise that clause 2 provides that a person shall not be guilty if it happens in the process of lawful acts, but I wanted to draw attention to the legitimate rights of farmers and foresters as they go about their duties.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) said on Second Reading:

"Accidents happen in the countryside, particularly involving farmers and forestry staff. It is easy to drive a truck or heavy vehicle carrying trees over a sett and damage it. I should not wish such an accident to result in people being sent to court."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. 1159.]

I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will mention that aspect. I do not doubt that the majority of farmers will not be too concerned, as they

know the location of the badger setts. Nevertheless, there will be accidents—one was reported only the other day—and there must be some defence when such accidents occur.

I am interested in amendment No. 16, because the National Farmers Union has made a particular plea about it. I say to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, as I have said to him previously, that I have fought two general elections in his constituency, where unquestionably the sheep substantially outnumber the voters. The livelihood of many of the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituents depends on a successful lambing season. Whatever the arguments about the figures, the fact is that farmers go to considerable trouble to maintain a fox population that does not endanger newly-born lambs.

The activities of the David Davies hunt and the addresses recalled by the hon. and learned Gentleman revived memories of happy canvassing in the early 1960s. He was right to say that the David Davies hunt is a working hunt. I met many of those involved in it, although I never had any other direct contact with them.

The NFU has written a sensible letter. I hope that the House will forgive me if I quote from it at some length, because it makes my point for me. The parliamentary adviser to the NFU, Mr. Holbeche, wrote:

"However, as awareness of the issues raised by the Bill has grown in the countryside, it has become clear that farmers in sheep farming areas in particular are worried that as it stands the Bill could jeopardise legitimate fox control. For example, in parts of Wales and south-west England, sheep farmers report significant losses during the lambing season from predatory foxes. Accurate figures are hard to come by though it would appear that at the present time the threat from foxes is exceeded by that posed by uncontrolled dogs. Although what surveys have been done to date suggest that foxes account for a relatively small percentage of lamb losses, there is much concern that the threat is increasing on the edge of urban areas, and in parts of Wales where the Forestry Commission has cut back its pest control operations for budgetary reasons. Preventive action to control foxes would be seriously hampered by the Bill's total prohibition on the digging of foxes where they run to earth in a badger sett, including abandoned entrances to active setts which would be protected by the Bill. . . . For these reasons we would support an amendment to the Bill to leave out lines 47 and 48 on page 2. This change to clause 4 would remove the proposed prohibition on the granting of licences permitting dogs to be entered into badger setts. The principle of licensing to allow for anything done in relation to protected wildlife that would otherwise be unlawful is well established, notably in section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981."

The letter then goes on to promote the general case.

I have a large badger sett next to the first field on the farm where I have lived for many years. There is no physical way of getting a fox out of a badger sett other than by using a terrier or other dogs. We must accept that most hill farmers think that this is a serious matter and that they must take steps to keep down the fox population, and the only way to do that is to use dogs to get the foxes out of the badger setts.

I share the view of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery that amendment No. 16 would be more likely to protect badgers than not. I am concerned about the reasons why the clause is even in the Bill, but I am sure that the hon. Member for Newport, East will say something about that. I congratulate both him and the hon. Members who took a critical view of the Bill on Second Reading on the way in which they have sought to reach a sensible compromise. At one time, the issues appeared virtually irreconcilable. I am glad that common sense has prevailed, as I hope it will on this amendment.

Mr. Ron Davies: I am in some difficulty, because I want to speak against amendments Nos. 3 and 4. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), but I am not sure whether he intends to press the amendments. The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), whose name also appears on the amendments, has listened carefully to the debate. If either hon. Member could say whether he was prepared to withdraw the amendments, that would help our deliberations.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to ask your advice. I think that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is in fact referring to amendments Nos. 4 and 5.

Mr. Davies: No, I am referring to Nos. 3 and 4.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There are three distinct cases to be put within this group of amendments. I had intended at a later stage to ask your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on how to split the group for voting purposes. I intend to request a vote on amendments Nos. 4 and 5. I have not yet made a decision on amendment No. 3.

Mr. Gale: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you are to consider splitting the group of amendments for voting purposes, I hope that you will also consider separating amendments Nos. 3 and 18. Amendment No. 18 refers to bodily harm, and it makes a great deal of difference to amendment No. 3.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Obviously, much will depend on what happens to amendment No. 1 when it is put to the House. In the appropriate circumstances, I would sympathetically consider the possibility of a separate Division on amendment No. 5. If amendment No. 1 fell, it would be difficult to vote on amendment No. 4. It might be sensible if I reflect on the points that have been raised before I put the Question. That might be the most helpful course.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Upminster for giving us some idea about his intentions. I want to speak briefly against amendment No. 4. We have had a wide debate about the problems of Welsh upland sheep farmers. I note with interest the comments by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) about Liberal Democrat policy. I am delighted to know that in that regard, it fully complies with Labour party policy. I was also struck by the intense concern that the fox-hunting lobby now shows for the interests of Welsh sheep farmers. I have no doubt that tabling the amendments is a clear attempt by the fox-hunting lobby in the House to weaken the Bill so that foxhunters can continue to enjoy their sport, as they see it, without further interference. That is the purpose of the amendments, and that is why I want to speak against amendment No. 4. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will also oppose that amendment.

We have heard the argument about the damage done to sheep farming interests and especially to lambs as a result of predation by foxes. From my own experience, I have no doubt that a problem is caused in upland farms by the predation of foxes on sheep. However, we must get the matter in perspective. The Ministry of Agriculture,

[Mr. Davies]

Fisheries and Food and the National Farmers Union have made it clear—and all the evidence is available—that, as a national problem, such predation is of minimal significance. However, I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery that predation could be a problem locally. I know that some farmers suffer considerable losses and are understandably anxious to find out about all the methods that can be used to control foxes, in the hope that it will minimise losses of lambs.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will note that, on my farm in mid-Wales in the mid-1980s, I lost 34 lambs one spring, certainly because of foxes. I had a badger sett on my farm, about which I told no one. The hon. Gentleman should not underestimate the problem. Foxes kill many lambs in spring and that can cause substantial financial disbenefit to the farmers concerned. We must be careful on this issue.

Mr. Davies: I do not know when the hon. Gentleman came in. He has made precisely the point that I was making. I do not underestimate the problem, and I acknowledge that it can be a severe problem locally. I have spent more cold March and April nights than I care to recall on the mountains in my constituency at lambing time shooting foxes. I understand the problem, and I understand its severe impact on some farmers.

The question that we must ask is why some Conservative Members seek grievously to weaken a Bill to protect badger setts on the basis of a small and localised problem. It is an inappropriate response to the problems of fox predation on lambs in upland Wales to seek to weaken a Bill that should extend protection to badger setts throughout the United Kingdom.

Foxes can be controlled if they are a problem, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery said, possibly by the use of hounds driving to guns. I am not satisfied that, if there are localised problems and if foxes occasionally take refuge in badger setts, it is an appropriate response for the House to weaken a measure that seeks to protect badger setts and to allow interference with badger setts.

After listening to the debate, I have come to the conclusion that there is a deliberate attempt by fox-hunting interests to weaken the Bill. Some hon. Members will use any argument. They call in aid the economic interests of sheep farmers, because they will not argue truthfully that they enjoy what they regard as a sport and that they want to continue to enjoy it without interference. They are willing to weaken legislation to protect badger setts to allow them to continue enjoying their sport. It is cynical for them to attempt to torpedo such a Bill. That approach illustrates the arrogant and selfish attitude that is represented by the Tory fox-hunting interests in the House this morning.

10.45 am

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): The last remarks of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) were——

Mr. Wiggin: They were disgraceful.

Mr. Paice: As my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) has said, they were disgraceful. The end of the speech was typical of the bombastic way in which the hon. Member for Caerphilly often assaults Conservative Members. He makes many aspersions against our characters, our habits and our motives, which are wholly without justification.

I have not hunted foxes for 25 years. At that time, I was a member of a pony club, but I hunted only once or twice. I am not a regular foxhunter, I do not go to hunts and I give no particular support to fox hunting, although I support the right of the individual to have the freedom to do what he wants. It is despicable to suggest that those of us who are genuinely concerned about aspects of the Bill have some ulterior motive connected with fox hunting. That is nonsense.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly and his hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) are both Opposition spokesmen on agricultural matters. I suspect that many farmers will look carefully at what they have said about the problem of attacks on lambs.

Mr. Morley: As an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, I have listened carefully to what the National Farmers Union and my local farmers have said about the problem of predation. We have made it clear that there can be localised problems and that they can often be dealt with efficiently and effectively by contractors. [HON. MEMBERS: "Contractors?"] Yes, by contractors. Can the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) give me one example of an independent report that demonstrates that there is a major problem of predation by foxes? Many reports do not show that. Many farmers tell me that often more disturbance is caused by hounds chasing foxes across fields than by the foxes themselves.

Mr. Paice: I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's use of the word "contractors". There are contractors in a range of agricultural activities. I have never heard of contractors who would get foxes out of their hiding places.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: Of course. We are here to be enlightened.

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman has given way to a farmer who farms in an area in which we have had problems with foxes. In my part of the world, there is an excellent rabbit clearance society that employs a trapper who is by far the most efficient person to control foxes and who uses a gun. He knows where the foxes will be at any time of day, and he can kill them quickly and humanely without needing to dig them out. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has made a serious point.

Mr. Paice: The obvious retort is that one way of controlling rabbits is to allow foxes to do it. The other problem is that trapping is one of the cruellest ways in which to control foxes. It often means a drawn-out——

Mr. Morley: They shoot the foxes.

Mr. Paice: The foxes have to be trapped before they are shot unless they are drawn to a bait. I know what I am talking about.

The most important aspect is the question of predation, to which Labour Members have referred. One can, of course, say that only 0·5 or 1 per cent. of lambs are lost through predation and that one can, therefore, disregard

the problem. It is true that there are greater losses from other causes, such as nutritional problems and stillbirths. There are other reasons why lambs do not survive. All farmers are anxious to reduce lamb mortality. It is the key criterion for profitability in sheep farming. Through a range of measures, such as training courses, farmers are able to set about reducing lamb mortality. They do it by learning about and providing better nutrition and in many other ways. Labour Members have said that that is all very well, but that there is one form of predation that they should not be able to do anything about. That is unjust and unfair on those producers.

Just as some Labour Members have cast aspersions on the motives of some Conservative Members, there are others outside the House who see the Bill as a means of getting at foxhunters. That is not what the Bill should be about. I share the view of many hon. Members that badger baiting is an abhorrent sport which must be stamped out. I shall support the Bill to the end in its efforts to do that, but we should not confuse a debate about the merits and demerits of fox hunting with the Bill. If hon. Members wish to debate that, I know that many hon. Members from both sides of the House would like to participate, but the Bill should not be used as a vehicle to take a side swipe at fox hunting.

Many people hold the belief—I fear that this came through in the speech of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara)—that nature is benign, and consists only of lambs gambolling and birds singing. The reality is different. Those of us who have lived and grown up in the countryside know that nature is extremely cruel and vicious—often more cruel and vicious than man, who has lowered himself to some pretty despicable acts.

We have to control foxes. They take lambs. Although doubts have been cast about some of the evidence and it has been suggested that some of it is anecdotal, I have witnessed that happening and I am sure that other hon. Members have done so. It is all very well to say that foxes take only sick or weak lambs. That is true if one defines a weak lamb as one that is only a few minutes old. Many lambs are taken almost immediately after they are born. If the ewe is tired after a difficult lambing and is unable to get back to her feet, that is an ideal opportunity for a fox to rush in and take a lamb. To dismiss the problem by saying that it involves only sick and weakly lambs fails to recognise reality.

None of the amendments, if accepted, would diminish the Bill's ability to deal with what it sets out to do, which is to end the despicable way in which a tiny minority seek to extract badgers from their setts to carry out their vile sport of badger baiting. It is an important Bill which should not be jeopardised or lost because some people wish to use it for ulterior motives, whatever they may be. So that we can do something about badger baiting, I hope that the House will recognise the merits of the amendments and accept them so that the Bill can become law.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: This has been an extremely good debate on the amendments that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) have tabled. It has been spoiled only by the obvious prejudice shown by the hon. Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). Until then I thought that the debate had been balanced and fair, but I am afraid that it was not once the hon. Member for Caerphilly gave his views.

Among other things, it has been alleged that foxes do not do any significant damage to lambs. I am a farmer and I must advise the House that two lambs have been taken from my farm by foxes this spring.

Mr. Ron Davies: I hope that the hon. Gentleman listened carefully to my speech. I did not suggest for one moment that there was not a problem. I said that there was a limited problem nationally, but I acknowledged that the problem can be severe locally.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has clarified his remarks, but I do not acknowledge that a problem that is limited can be severe locally, and this problem is severe locally. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) produced statistics showing that only 0·5 per cent. of lambs were taken. That is no consolation to farmers in areas with a large sheep population of, say, several thousand sheep and where five sheep out of every thousand might be taken.

Mr. O'Hara: I reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has said. I do not underestimate the scale of the problem either locally or nationally. I merely suggested that there should be a more scientific assessment of the problem nationally and that appropriate and not unnecessary measures should be available to deal with severe local problems.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am glad that the problems faced by sheep farmers, both locally and nationally, in the depredation of their sheep flocks by foxes are recognised by Labour Members. That is an advance on the previous position as I understood it.

Mr. Colvin: I am sure that my hon. Friend will acknowledge that the figures produced on damage to sheep by fox hunting—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."]—by foxes illustrate that fox hunting with terriers is effective. If the Bill ended that perfectly legitimate activity, sheep losses would be very much higher.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend is right. Despite his slip of the tongue, I do not think that even the Labour Members with the most extreme views would suggest that fox hunting damages sheep.

In opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside covered most of the issues comprehensively and well and I shall not repeat his arguments. The amendments can be divided into four groups—amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 3; Nos. 4 and 5; No. 16; and No. 18—each of which has a different merit and argument. I shall return to that when it comes to a vote.

I shall not cover amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 3 because my hon. Friends have done that extremely well. I shall examine more closely amendments Nos. 4 and 5 in the light of the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), who unfortunately is not in his place, because his views showed a deep prejudice about why the amendments had been tabled and an unfortunate misunderstanding of their consequences. I hope that all hon. Members who have open minds will accept that the amendments are not designed to weaken the protection of badgers. I and all my hon. Friends who have been involved with this Bill this year and with a similar Bill last year have sought to reach, and to a large extent succeeded in reaching, a compromise that will allow a continuation of countryside activities, especially hunting, with the

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substantial protection of the badger that is offered by the Bill in addition to the great protection afforded by the Badgers Act 1973.

Clause 1 adds the following five offences to that Act:

"(3) If any person shall interfere with a badger sett by doing any of the following things, that is to say,

(a) damaging a badger sett or any part thereof;

(b) destroying a badger sett;

(c) obstructing access to or any entrance of a badger sett;

(d) causing a dog to enter a badger sett; or

(e) disturbing a badger when it is occupying a badger sett

intending to do any of those things or being reckless as to whether his actions will have any of those consequences, he shall be guilty of an offence.".

Provided that proper defences are given against the charge of having perpetrated such actions, I agree that they should be criminal offences. The question is whether adequate defences are afforded by the Act. I contend that adequate defences for innocent acts are not provided. Therefore, I have tabled amendments to deal with my concerns and those of many others, especially the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), whose speech I greatly welcomed. He underlined the danger to the Welsh hill farmer that the Bill would pose if sensible amendments were not agreed.

11 am

Amendment No. 4 would insert the following subsection:

"An accused shall not be permitted to rebut a presumption of guilt established under sections 1(1A) or 2(2) by evidence that he was engaged in any other activity save where he can show that he was authorised to be engaged in that activity by the occupier of the land on which the alleged offence occurred."

That provides a substantial and significant safeguard. No one could argue legitimately—or even illegitimately—that that provision would weaken the existing legislation. It provides yet another layer of proof that anyone out with terriers or other dogs would have to establish to avoid prosecution. I suspect that the only reason why Opposition Members are unable to agree with that contention was summarised neatly by the hon. Member for Caerphilly when he expressed his attitude to those who hunt. He is clearly prejudiced against landowners, farmers and those who live in the countryside and carry on their sports on it. He does not want those people to be involved in the way in which these matters are progressed. He is roaring with laughter and rolling from side to side, but that is the inevitable conclusion of anyone who reads his speeches.

Mr. Gale: I am sure that my hon. Friend accepts that I am not anti-landowner. I represent many farmers. I do not share some of the sentiments of Opposition Members, but there is genuine opposition to some of the amendments simply because they would weaken the Bill.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am glad that my hon. Friend has come back into the Chamber. I hoped that he would. I hope that, when he hears my arguments, he will accept that the amendments would not weaken the Bill and make it harder to catch and prosecute badger baiters, against whom we all feel strongly. The amendments are necessary to safeguard the legitimate and proper interests of others who are not badger baiting, but who could be wrongfully prosecuted under the legislation while carrying out more harmless pursuits unless proper safeguards are put in the Bill.

My hon. Friend did not deal with amendment No. 4, which would provide an additional safeguard. Badger baiters would be caught, even if they advanced any of the existing defences, unless they could establish that the owner or occupier of the land had given them permission to use that land. Unless my hon. Friend thinks that the owners or occupiers of land are accessories to badger baiting—which is virtually never the case—he should not feel that the amendment does anything other than include another safeguard against the badger baiting that we all wish to prevent.

The second part of amendment No. 4 provides:

"A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 2(3)(e) (disturbing a badger) by reason of entering a terrier into a badger sett provided that his action would otherwise have been lawful."

That is intended specifically to help the Welsh farmer and those who hunt foxes with terriers, who face difficulties when foxes enter an earth or a sett where badgers have been. Those who live in the country know that it is not always easy to know whether a fox or a badger is present. I fear that people in perfectly legitimate pursuit of a fox will be caught by the Bill unless the amendment is included.

Mr. Morley: I have followed the hon. Gentleman's arguments carefully. He wants the Bill to be changed to allow terriers to be put down badger setts to get foxes out of them in order to destroy the foxes. Why is it that in Northern Ireland no such protection of badger setts exists, nor are they allowed to be stopped, yet fox hunters pursue their sport adequately? In Northern Ireland, sheep flocks have increased substantially without any detrimental effect on the sheep farmers. Therefore, why do we need the amendment?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not believe that fox control is needed in Northern Ireland to the same extent as it is in the areas to which I am referring. The primary purpose of most of the hunts in Northern Ireland is sport. The Bill covers the whole of the United Kingdom, and it would make it almost impossible to hunt in the Welsh hills unless the amendments were accepted.

Amendment No. 5 does not amend the Bill substantially. It deals with clause 2, which provides the defence against the offences in clause 1. Clause 2 states:

(1) In section 8(1A) of the Badgers Act 1973—

(a) after the words 'under section 1(1)' there shall be inserted 'or 2(3)'; and

(b) after paragraph (b) there shall be inserted—

(c) the interfering with any badger sett;'

(2) At the end of section 8 of the Badgers Act 1973 there shall be added—

'(4) A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section (3) *(a)*, *(c)* or *(e)* of this Act if he shows that his action was the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not have been reasonably avoided.'."

The consequence of that defence is that those who are pursuing the activities defined in clause 1 will not be defended against actions in paragraphs *(b)* and *(d)* in that clause. The defences provided in the Bill cover those who damage and obstruct access to a badger sett and those who disturb a badger, but they do not cover those who destroy a badger sett and those who cause a dog to enter a badger sett. There is no reason to make that distinction. Although it would be unfortunate if someone, in the course of a

lawful action, destroyed a badger sett and his action could not reasonably have been avoided, I cannot see why he should be brought within the scope of the Bill for that reason when, if he damaged the badger sett, he would not be. I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will deal with that when he replies.

Where should the line be drawn? Should a distinction be made between severely damaging and destroying a badger sett by driving a tractor over it by mistake? It is a dangerous line to try to draw. In either case it is not suggested that the badger is harmed by the activity. The amendment covers the destruction of the badger sett.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North that no one wishes to weaken the Bill. The amendment will not affect a badger baiter, who is most unlikely to want to destroy the badger sett, or to need to do so during his baiting. Catching the badger to bait is more likely to damage the sett, yet it is for damaging it that he has a possible defence under the Bill and may be able to wriggle out of it. If he destroys it, he has no such defence. That distinction is not needed to strengthen the protection of the badger.

The same applies to the action of causing a dog to enter a badger sett. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery was rightly concerned about the consequences for those who hunt with terriers in Wales. The amendment would assist them and is essential if they are to continue their activities.

Amendment No. 18 changes the wording from "harm" to "bodily harm". The reason is that "harm" is an extremely wide-ranging word. There are those who, given the slightest excuse, would take people to court in order to pursue a vendetta against them. The definition of "harm" is so wide that it is almost impossible to know what it means. That would certainly apply to the badger who was the victim of any such action. A badger baiter does bodily harm to a badger; there can be no question about that. In what way would the amendment weaken the Bill if its purpose is to protect the badger and has not spread into the wider issue of fox hunting? A number of Opposition Members have made it clear that they would welcome that, even if that is not their specific intention. The proposed amendment would not weaken the Bill's supposed purpose. I am reliably informed by the legal advice that I have taken that bodily harm includes stress-related harm. If a badger shows signs of physical distress arising from the stress caused to it, that would be included in the definition of bodily harm. I cannot see that the Bill's objective would be weakened if "bodily harm" were substituted for "harm".

Mr. Hardy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his reference to the stress-related aspect of the matter. One of my anxieties is that the diggers in the east midlands and South Yorkshire are frequently at their busiest when cubs have just been born and the sow is lactating. Would the hon. Gentleman's amendment include harm caused to badger cubs because the sow had been removed or disturbed? The defence may be that the digger did not know that there were cubs below the ground. Would that exclusion provide the digger with an excuse under the terms of the Bill as amended? Apart from that, I am grateful for his reassurance.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: And I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I appreciate his great expertise in these matters, as I have said in previous debates. I should not like to give him a categorical assurance that that would be the case, but it is certainly my understanding that it would. Bodily harm suffered by a cub would be bodily harm suffered by a badger, as a direct consequence of the act of the badger baiter. It is most unlikely that he would get away with the kind of activity to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Gale: I referred to that point when I spoke briefly earlier in the debate. The reason I raised it and the reason I highlighted the comment made by the League Against Cruel Sports, which in the sense of clause 1 is incorrect but which in the sense of clause 5 is correct, is that my hon. Friend must answer the same question as I put to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin): would he regard harm done to a badger that had been blocked out of its home while absent hunting at night as bodily harm? There is a considerable difference. Many of us feel strongly that the proposed amendment would create an opportunity for the unscrupulous to block up a badger sett while the badger was out hunting, thus depriving it of its sett. It is a moot point whether that would be bodily harm or harm.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I suppose that it is a moot point whether it would be harm at all if the badger managed to find another unoccupied sett close by and went into that instead. If the badger suffered any demonstrable bodily harm as a result of being shut out of the sett, that would indeed be bodily harm. If, however, it could be said that the badger was mightily upset and inconvenienced but not damaged by the action, it would not be bodily harm. We have to keep a sense of proportion. My hon. Friend understands the countryside well. Therefore, he knows that badgers are capable of occupying any hole in the ground. Near most of the main setts there are ancillary setts. That is one reason why there have been so many problems over the question of what is and what is not an occupied sett.

The answer to my hon. Friend is that, if it really harmed the badger, the badger baiter would be caught under bodily harm. If, however, my hon. Friend is talking about inconvenience and upset to the badger, the badger baiter would not be caught. I do not believe that the criminal law should be used against those who inconvenience and upset badgers. I am afraid that there would be no end to it, in terms of the inconvenience and the upsetting of budgerigars when kept in cages, as well as all the other inconveniences caused to animals by man. Therefore, I beg my hon. Friend to keep a sense of proportion. If the badger is seriously and genuinely harmed, that should be a criminal offence. The Bill, as I propose it should be amended, would cover that eventuality.

I believe that the clauses fall happily into groups. I hope to have the opportunity to vote on the amendments to clauses 4 and 5 and also on amendments Nos. 16 and 18 separately, if necessary. I hope that sufficient hon. Members who have listened to the debate are now persuaded that at least some of the amendments are acceptable, although they may not be prepared to accept all of them.

11.15 am

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I do not believe that the interests of badgers are best served by the scoring of party points across the Floor of the House or between hon. Members on the same side of the Chamber. Moreover, I do not believe that the interests of badgers are best served by turning this debate into a debate on the future of hunting. We should be profoundly uninterested in the debate about the future of hunting today, since today's debate is about the protection, preservation and the continuation of the badger's life style. If, as is estimated, 9,000 badgers are losing their lives illegally each year, those are 9,000 reasons why we should aim at getting this measure on to the statute book as fast as is humanly possible.

Mr. Ron Davies: The hon. Gentleman may like to think that that is the case and that it is possible to proceed on the basis of consensus. However, he must recognise that amendments have been tabled by people who are directly and publicly associated with fox hunting. Those amendments would grievously weaken the Bill. The purpose of the amendments is to allow fox hunting to continue. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away from that conflict of interest.

Mr. Bowis: I entirely accept that amendments have been tabled that are designed to protect the interests of fox hunting, and that a balance must be struck between the interests of fox hunting and the interests of sheep and all those who live in the countryside. We are seeking to bring together all those broad interests when considering the protection of the badger, as the Bill seeks to do.

We went to great lengths in Committee to meet the genuine and reasonable arguments by the hunting community. Clause 3 was added in response to those demands. That is a tribute to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), the promoter of the Bill, who was willing to seek a compromise and a balance between all the interests in the countryside to which I have referred. I have listened carefully to the arguments on amendment No. 16. I am also prepared to listen to the arguments on the amendment relating to marking. We must be careful, however, not to amend the Bill in such a way that it becomes impossible to enforce in the courts.

I intend to refer to four of the amendments, about three of which I have strong doubts; on the fourth, I am open to persuasion. I have the strongest doubts about amendment No. 2, which seeks to delete the offence of causing a dog to enter a badger sett. If that is deleted, it is deleted not only for the well-intentioned huntsman or farmer but for any immoral or evil person. The amendment is far too wide, and it would be wrong to accept it.

I hope that my hon. Friends will correct me if I am wrong, but as I understand amendment No. 4, it provides the acting-under-orders defence. I am not a lawyer, but I find the language used a little puzzling:

"An accused shall not be permitted to rebut a presumption of guilt".

I always understood that, under British law, the presumption was innocent until proven guilty and that guilt cannot be presumed until the courts have so decided.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend is wrong about the law in this instance. Under British law, there is a presumption of innocence except where statute provides that there should be a presumption of guilt, and the Badgers Act 1973 is such an Act. Therefore, there is a presumption of guilt unless innocence is established. That is why the amendment is so phrased.

Amendment No. 4 has nothing to do with acting under orders. Somebody who uses someone else's land for badger baiting and legitimate terrier hunting, and interferes with a badger sett, would have no defence unless the landowner or occupier had given permission. It would make it impossible for somebody to say that he was acting lawfully for the hunt when he was not, unless the landowner or occupier was prepared to back his story, which he would not be.

Mr. Bowis: I accept my hon. Friend's interpretation of the law, as I think that he is a lawyer. However, the amendment establishes an offence, and the Bill allows certain defences to be considered in court. I still think that it is odd that we should include in the Bill the inability to rebut guilt. Surely we all have a right to prove our innocence in court.

I am more concerned about the exemption where someone can show that they have authorisation from the occupier of land. That is simply unnecessary; either it is an offence or not. It does not matter whether it is committed by the occupier or by somebody acting on his behalf. It is no defence in law to say, "I did it only because he said I could do it, guv." If the law says, "Thou shall not do it," thou shall not do it, and it is not good enough for someone to say, "The owner gave me permission."

Mr. Colvin: I thought that, in moving the amendment, I had explained fairly fully how it would work. It is unthinkable that the owner or occupier of land would authorise somebody to dig for badgers on his land, because in doing so he would be committing an offence. In practice, badger diggers dig on land without permission and are therefore guilty of trespass, which is already an offence. That is why the amendment would not give rise to the fears that my hon. Friend expresses.

Mr. Bowis: I am simply saying that the amendment is unnecessary because, if it is a legal activity, it is a legal activity. My hon. Friend's point about trespass is different. If it is illegal, the fact that a landowner gave permission should not be a defence for the perpetrator. That is all I am seeking to suggest.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not follow my hon. Friend's logic. The amendment does not establish that somebody who is on land for an illegal purpose will be acting lawfully because a landowner gave permission. It makes it harder for somebody who is on land for an illegal purpose to pretend that his purpose is legal, because a landowner will say, "I never gave permission."

Mr. Bowis: No doubt we could discuss that legal argument.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) referred to amendment No. 18. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) questioned the definition of "bodily harm", about which my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) admitted there is a difficulty. He singled out the word "harm", but equally one can question the phrase "bodily harm". I am concerned about badger cubs being blocked out of their setts. Evidence shows that they have perished during harsh weather because they lost their shelter and habitat. A court of law would not necessarily regard that as bodily harm.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster used the word "demonstrable". It is better to use the word "harm" than to limit it to "bodily harm", as "harm" covers a variety of causes of a badger's death.

What will result from amendment No. 16, because we are in the world of double negatives? If we accept the amendment, does it mean that the licence would permit such action, or does it mean that the licence would not not permit it? The amendment needs clarifying before we accept it.

The Bill is just about right. I am prepared to listen to hon. Members' views on amendment No. 16 and on later amendments, but we should remember that protection is available to law abiding people. I hasten to suggest that there could not be anything but a law-abiding farmer, as I am married to a farmer's daughter—all farmers are law abiding, honest and wish to protect badgers—but we must ensure that the law protects the badger from the actions of people who do not fall into that category. The Bill mentions someone

"being reckless as to whether his actions will have any of those consequences, he shall be guilty."

There must be intent and recklessness. That is the defence that the law-abiding user of the countryside needs to protect his genuine activities.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I shall be extremely brief, but as I represent Exmoor and the Brendon hills, which are substantial sheep farming areas in the west country, I want to reinforce the points that were put so powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) and by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). The hon. and learned Member was a little ambiguous about the Liberal party's position on fox hunting, but I shall let that pass. His speech contrasted with those of the hon. Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), which reinforced a point that Conservative Members have made before in the House—that the Labour party is abdicating all interest in the countryside and the farming community and is restricting itself to its heartlands.

Farmers in my constituency, which is a substantial sheep farming area, are suffering considerable financial difficulty. They would want me to support amendment No. 16 and the other amendments as explained by my hon. Friends. The National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association have written to hon. Members.

Various hon. Members have referred to the role of predators. It is ironic that, at the other end of my constituency, on the Somerset levels, nature conservation societies are concerned about the decline in the population of wading birds. It has been suggested that badgers may be responsible for that, and, although badgers are attractive animals, they may have played a role in it.

I do not however, wish to resile from the commitment that I expressed in Committee, which the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will remember, to see the Bill progress satisfactorily to the statute book. The National Farmers Union has made it clear that it wants the law to be tightened up on badger baiters, who are usually trespassing on farmland. Occasionally, there are reports of farmers being intimidated or physically threatened by badger baiters. I hope, therefore, that the Bill will be successful and that the hon. Member for Newport, East will listen to the powerful representations from both sides of the House, particularly from those of us with substantial sheep farming interests in England and Wales, and will concede the amendments.

11.30 am

Mr. Roy Hughes: All hon. Members have expressed their concern about the continuing ill treatment of badgers. I have spoken to many people and organisations to try to reach a consensus so that the Bill may become law and thus do much to close the loopholes in existing legislation. I have approached the matter in a spirit of reasonableness and have tried to make it clear from the outset that the Bill is not about outlawing fox hunting, and nor is it intended to interfere with farmers' legitimate interests. Yesterday the findings of a Gallup poll showed that 93 per cent. of those interviewed supported the Bill, which is pretty formidable backing.

The amendments rehash the Bill that was presented by the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), which failed to receive a Second Reading. I am sorry that those old arguments have been resurrected because I thought that they had been settled after Second Reading, and especially after the amicable Committee stage.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead the House. The reason that my Bill failed to receive a Second Reading was technical: I could not ask for my Bill to be given a Second Reading once the hon. Gentleman's Bill had received one. Therefore, any implication that my Bill did not receive a Second Reading on grounds of merit is misleading.

Mr. Hughes: I accept the hon. Gentleman's explanation.

I have taken advice from all the animal welfare organisations, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the National Federation of Badger Groups and the League Against Cruel Sports. All those organisations feel that the amendments, with the exception of amendment No. 16, are dangerous and could even undermine the Badgers Act 1973. The hon. Members for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) appear to support that contention. The amendments would make interference—destruction, damage or blockage—a criminal offence only if it could be shown that the interference was likely to cause bodily harm to a badger. At night, badgers go out foraging for food. If the relevant amendment were successful, an unscrupulous developer could bulldoze a badger sett at night—there was one such incident recently in Petersfield. Alternatively, a farmer could block the entrance of a badger sett with slurry, or a hunter could block it with oil drums or rocks. Because badgers are not in their setts at night, they would be unlikely to suffer bodily harm as a result of such actions.

There is also the issue of putting a dog into a sett. The amendment seeks to take it out of the category of sett interference, making it a separate offence. At present any person accused of such an offence must prove that he was not digging for badgers. There is now a reversal of the onus of proof. The amendment will permit the use of the defence of digging for foxes if permission has been received from the owner of the land. Again, that could lead to

[Mr. Hughes]

intimidation of farmers by badger diggers. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) referred to one such incident.

Welsh hill farmers are going through a difficult period and are finding it hard to earn a living. I would be the first to defend their interests. Accurate figures on the threat to their land are hard to come by, but, from my research, it appears that the threat from foxes is exceeded by that posed by uncontrolled dogs. That is the answer to some of the remarks made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara).

The amendment would allow a terrier to enter a sett if it was claimed that the person responsible was hunting for foxes or rabbits. Such a provision is wide open to abuse. Under amendment No. 5 someone could completely destroy a badger sett or put dogs into it if he could prove that it was incidental action of a lawful operation. The Bill provides only for the defence of damage, obstruction or disturbance—for example, damage caused by a fallen tree. To extend the provision to total destruction or to allow dogs to enter opens more loopholes and would certainly be exploited by unscrupulous people. Provided that the operation was lawful, a sett would have no protection against destruction or interference.

As I want the Bill to progress to Third Reading, I shall make a considerable concession. I have discussed the matter at length with the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison), and I am prepared to accept amendment No. 16. As a result of that gesture, I hope that the other amendments will be withdrawn.

Mr. Colvin: With the permission of the House, I hope that I may respond to one or two issues raised by hon. Members during the debate, which was constructive and thoughtful, and based on considerable knowledge of the subject. As is inevitable with an emotive subject, some of the old prejudices bubbled to the surface. Why fox hunting per se should always be associated with badger digging, I do not know. The Bill might stop many perfectly lawful activities because it affects all countryside pursuits, including fox hunting and farming, and relates to landowners.

The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) made a major concession in accepting the arguments that were expressed extremely well during the debate by my hon. Friends the Members for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), and by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). I am pleased that the spirit of compromise and discussion that prevailed during the Bill's passage, particularly in Committee, has prevailed this morning. I hope that when I make clear what I wish to do about dividing the House on some of the amendments, the same spirit of co-operation and discussion will prevail so that the Bill can wend its way from this place to the other place, as I hope it will. There are many hurdles for the Bill yet to overcome.

The hon. Member for Newport, East referred to a Gallup poll showing that 93 per cent. of the people questioned supported the Bill. I am sure that they did not. I am sure that what they supported, as all hon. Members do, was the Bill's objective—there is a fundamental difference. If most people questioned were subjected to the detailed provisions of the Bill, many of them would express the sort of reservations voiced by hon. Members this morning. Nevertheless, I gladly accept the concession made by the hon. Member for Newport, East, and I am pleased that amendment No. 16 will, with the leave of the House, be accepted.

I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) about his Bill, which was well drafted and would have worked. It was only as a result of a procedural technicality, and the fact that the Bill of the hon. Member for Newport, East, which was so like the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster, had already begun its passage through the House that my hon. Friend's Bill was not allowed to proceed. It is not permitted for two almost identical Bills to proceed through the House. So my hon. Friend's Bill had to be withdrawn. Should the Bill of the hon. Member for Newport, East fail, my hon. Friend's Bill is ready to be resurrected—perhaps in the next Session. But let us hope that this Bill succeeds.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who I am sorry to say is not in the Chamber now, spoke with some passion on amendment No. 4. He suggested that the object of that amendment was to torpedo the Bill. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are legitimate interests to defend, and if we can amend the Bill properly, we should do so.

The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) has been adequately answered by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster. I shall try to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North that the object of the amendments is not to provide loopholes through which those who genuinely dig for badgers and perpetrate the crimes that we want to stop will be able to escape.

Nobody has yet mentioned that the amendments would enlist the support of country people. Any legislation is only as good as its enforcement. If people are not "on side" with the law, it is sometimes difficult to obtain their co-operation to ensure that those committing the crimes are reported to the police, the evidence is gathered and the law works in practice. If the amendments were approved en bloc, the Bill would have the wholehearted support of country people and would be much more effective. I believe that hon. Members should consider how far they are prepared to go in rejecting the amendments and possibly prejudicing and damaging the legislation's enforceability.

11.45 am

The hon. Member for Newport, East has said that he accepts amendment No. 16. I intend to divide the House on amendment No. 4. How should we proceed, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Should we take the amendments in numerical order or as a group? Will we take them one by one?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall seek to help the hon. Gentleman and the House. We shall follow the normal practice. We do not, except with the leave of the House, put amendments formally as a group. I shall put the Question that has already been proposed on amendment No. 1. Should amendment No. 1 be rejected, I doubt whether I can put to the House any of the amendments that come before amendment No. 5, because they would not be available for proposal. However, if the House rejects amendment No. 1, I should be prepared to consider

allowing a Division on amendment No. 5, should the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) seek to press for one. I hope that I have given some guidance.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to ask the House to divide on amendment Nos. 18 and 5. I shall not seek to divide the House on amendment No. 4.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am advised that the House could divide on amendment No. 18 only if amendment No. 3 were carried, which is dependent on the House approving amendment No. 1—*[Interruption.]* I apologise. I am advised that amendment No. 3 can be put separately, irrespective of what the House decides on amendment No. 1. Therefore, we had better wait and see what the House decides on amendment No. 1. I shall then give further guidance.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have been advised that the security doors affecting access to the building from the Norman Shaw building are locked. We have made arrangements to have them opened, but I am exercising the discretion that I understand I have to extend the period before calling for the doors to be locked.

The House having divided: Ayes 19, Noes 100.

Division No. 139] **[11.48 am**

AYES

Arbuthnot, James
Benyon, W.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Budgen, Nicholas
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Colvin, Michael
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Geraint
Livsey, Richard
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Tredinnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Soames and
Mr. Jerry Wiggin.

NOES

Amess, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bell, Stuart
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dover, Den
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, John
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hardy, Peter
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knowles, Michael
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McKelvey, William
Maclean, David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Meale, Alan
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Nellist, Dave
Neubert, Sir Michael
Norris, Steve
O'Hara, Edward
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Turner, Dennis
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Elliot Morley and
Mr. Ron Davies.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 3

EXTENSION OF GENERAL EXCEPTIONS

Mr. Wiggin: I beg to move amendment No. 20, in page 2, line 1 at beginning insert—

'( ) In section 8 of the Badgers Act 1973, after subsection (1B), there is inserted—

"(1C) A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 2(3)(a), (b), (c) or (e) of this Act if he is lawfully engaged in the maintenance or improvement of any existing watercourse or drainage works, or the construction of new works required for the drainage of any land, including works for the purpose of defence against sea water or tidal water.".'.

Mr. Colvin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) accepted amendment No. 16, and that is not good enough.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When we have worked our way through other amendments, I shall ask the House to agree to that.

12 noon

Mr. Wiggin: In the storms during 1990, a flood bank in my constituency burst under the attack from the sea. More than 1,000 acres of high quality agricultural land were flooded and one domestic property was affected. The clear cause of the breach in the flood bank was a badger sett. Local farmers had drawn the matter to the attention of the National Rivers Authority, and there had been some debate about what should be done to deal with the problem. The delay militated against any action being taken, and the bank burst, with the consequences that I have outlined. A heavily piled repair was required and was costly. I went to inspect the work with local farmers and found that the badgers were at work again, as is often the case.

There should be an exemption under the Badgers Act 1973 so that those engaged in such flood protection work —the various fluvial and tidal flood defences, of which there are a great many in my part of the world—should be allowed priority.

People and property can be placed in danger. I asked the Wessex region of the National Rivers Authority to carry out a review of this matter throughout the region. In a letter dated 10 July 1990, Mr. Nigel Reader, the regional general manager of the Wessex region of the NRA, said:

[Mr. Wiggin]

"I have initiated a survey of all sea, tidal and fluvial flood defences in the Wessex Region, to identify the presence of badger setts. To date, some 10 significant setts have been identified throughout the region together with a smaller number of minor or inactive ones. I agree with your view that it is not in the best interests of safety to allow the matter to continue unchecked. It is for that reason that we are systematically pursuing with the Ministry of Agriculture appropriate methods of dealing with the identified problems, applying one or more of the options outlined earlier to you."

The difficulty is that such consultations, licences and so on take a great deal of time. Responsible bodies are involved in these matters—and they are responsible—and the main one is the National Rivers Authority. However, drainage authorities have responsibility for some areas, and practices differ from one part of the country to another. They should be exempted from the legislation, and my amendment seeks to do that.

There should not be any worry about the welfare of badgers, because it may well be possible to move them from the sites. However, we need legislation to protect people, who are now so conscious of the many ways in which the badger Acts apply that there is an essential nervousness. That was the objective of the legislation, and it has been achieved. I hope that the Bill's promoter will accept this modest amendment in the interests of safety and the countryside. It would in no way affect the welfare of badgers, which we all accept as the paramount purpose of the Bill.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): My hon. Friend is arguing about the time that it takes to pass the legislation. He is not arguing on a point of principle but on a technicality.

Mr. Wiggin: I am sorry that I have not made myself clear. It is question of time. In the past year or two, my part of the world has suffered from storms. When the wind is in the right direction and spring tides coincide, much of my constituency is threatened by the sea. When it is necessary to proceed, it is perfectly reasonable to say that, if badgers are in the way, they should not be considered. That is the aim of my amendment.

Mr. Roy Hughes: I appreciate the concern of the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) on this issue. He expressed similar sentiments on Second Reading. I assure him that drainage works or sea defence works, which are especially relevant in his constituency, are covered by clause 2(2), which states that, where damage caused

"was the incidental result of a lawful operation and could not have been reasonably avoided.",

section 8(1A) of the Badgers Act, 1973 makes the amendment unnecessary. Such works are also covered by the Bill's licensing provisions—I refer the hon. Gentleman to clause 4(b). I hope that I have given the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek leave to withdraw his amendment?

Mr. Wiggin *rose*——

Mr. Colvin: Do we not come to this in due course, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Question before the House is, That amendment No. 20 be made. Does the hon. Gentleman wish me to put the question or does he wish to withdraw the amendment?

Mr. Wiggin: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

EXTENSION OF GENERAL EXCEPTIONS

Sir Charles Morrison: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 2, line 3, leave out 'section 2(3)(c)' and insert 'section 2(3)(a), (c) or (e)'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 7, in page 2, line 5, leave out

'that he shall not dig into the tops or sides of the entrances,'.

No. 21, in page 2, line 5, leave out 'shall' and insert 'does'.

No. 22, in page 2, line 6, leave out 'shall not be' and insert 'are not'.

No. 23, in page 2, line 8, leave out 'shall be' and insert 'are'.

No. 8, in page 2, line 9, leave out 'clean'.

No. 9, in page 2, leave out lines 10 and 11 and insert 'or soil, or'.

No. 10, in page 2, line 13, leave out 'clean'.

No. 11, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'loose'.

No. 12, in page 2, leave out line 15 and insert

'and removed within twenty four hours'.

No. 13, in page 2, line 16, leave out 'consent of the landowner' and insert

'authority of the occupier of the land on which the sett is situated.'.

No. 14, in page 2, leave out lines 17 and 18.

No. 15, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

'(6) A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 2(3)(a) or (c) or (e) by reason of his hounds marking at a sett, provided they are withdrawn as soon as reasonably practicable.'.

Sir Charles Morrison: The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) introduced clause 3 into the Bill in Committee. Like other members of the Committee, I thanked him for doing that, because it meets a number of points on earth stopping that have been made by fox hunters and farmers who are concerned with fox control. None the less, I warned him that some amendments would be necessary. These amendments are those which, after consideration, I feel that it is important to make to clause 3. Some of the amendments do no more than correct defective drafting, but some are more substantial. I should emphasise how important earth stopping is for fox hunting and fox control. Without earth stopping, it is almost impossible to undertake fox hunting and to control foxes.

The clause states that a person shall not be guilty of an offence under clause 2(3)(c)—the offence of

"obstructing access to or any entrance of a badger sett"

—under certain conditions. However, in stopping a sett, a person could be held to have committed two other offences —disturbing the badgers, an offence set out in clause 1(3)(e) and damaging the sett, the offence set out in clause 1(3)(a). Amendment No. 6 simply allows disturbance to the badger or damage to a sett for the purpose of earth stopping and it removes the two anomalies that I have

briefly described. The amendment would not allow wholesale or excessive damage to a sett or serious disturbance to a badger, because clause 3 carefully describes how a sett can be blocked. Conditions such as the use of straw or hay or the removal of bundles within a certain time mean that harmful interference with the sett will be avoided.

Amendment No. 7 is concerned with digging for foxes inside a sett entrance. The act does not harm badgers, but it is not practicable for legislation to insist that every badger sett that is stopped must be stopped with imported material. Earth stoppers are frequently faced with large setts, which may be partly or temporarily disused, and many have 10 or even 20 or more entrances. In those circumstances, the sensible way to stop the earth is to cut into the sides of the entrance to produce a light covering. That would not harm the badger. If cutting into the sides of the entrances were not permitted—the effect of clause 3—stopping would be difficult. Therefore, I hope that amendment No. 7 will be accepted.

The Bill refers to clean straw, but in practice, defining clean straw would be extremely difficult. The hon. Member for Newport, East may be able to define what constitutes clean straw or say when it become dirty so that use of it is a breach of the law, but I feel that it is difficult to distinguish between clean and dirty straw. Those of us who have farmed know full well that, immediately after harvest, quite a lot of the straw is dirty for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it would be reasonable to accept amendments Nos. 8 and 10, which remove the requirement that the straw be clean.

12.15 pm

Amendments Nos. 9 and 11 deal with the requirement in clause 3 that the soil used in earth stopping is loose—a requirement which is neither sensible nor practical. It would be hard for the courts to determine whether the soil is loose. It may not be possible for an earth stopper to produce loose soil at a sett, particularly on a wet day when the soil tends to compact. Furthermore, if loose soil is dropped into the entrance of a sett, it will fall further down the hole than is desirable. The Masters of Fox Hounds Association recommends soft earth stopping, which is slightly different to loose soil but just as easy for the badger to remove. Therefore, the amendments remove the requirement that the soil should be loose. The provision for loose soil would seem to be unnecessary because clause 3 already contains the important condition that the soil must not be packed hard into the entrances of setts.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 12 deal with the time when stopping may take place. The provisions in clause 3 as to when setts are stopped and blocks are removed are somewhat confused. The first part of the defence permits stopping with soil and other material if it is placed in the entrances on the day of the hunt. This is unnecessary and impractical. Stopping with soil may be done before hunting, for instance to close up a large number of apparently disused holes. The stopping must be undertaken in accordance with the strict conditions set out and only for the purpose of hunting foxes with hounds, so it makes no difference whether the stopping takes place "on the day of the hunt" or earlier, because, if a badger is present, he will dig himself out. Therefore, amendment No. 9 removes the provision that this form of stopping may take place only "on the day of the hunt".

The second part of the defence permits stopping with various blocks, which must be subsequently removed. The provision specifies removal "on the same day". In general, stopping takes place on the same day as hunting, but there would be complications if stopping took place the day before the hunt, before midnight. The hon. Member for Newport, East will remember that I drew attention to that in Committee. This might occur when an earth stopper has a large number of holes to stop in a single night—a pretty regular event. In this case, the stop would have to be removed as soon as it was put in, because after midnight it would no longer be "the same day". Amendment No. 12 rewords the provision to make it clear that these stops should be removed within 24 hours. The amendment would make no difference to the badger, but it would make clause 3 infinitely more practical and realistic.

Amendments Nos. 13 and 14 deal with the authority of hunt recognised by the Masters of Fox Hounds Association and a register. This point was discussed briefly in Committee. The defence provided by clause 3 insists that earth stoppers must have the consent of land owners and the authority of a hunt recognised by the MFHA, which must keep a register of all earth stoppers.

The requirement that earth stoppers should have the consent of landowners is, in principle, a good one. I have no doubt, however, that a better wording is "authority of the occupier", as that recognises the rights of tenant farmers and other land occupiers and removes the need for any formal consent to be signified. We must be realistic. It is not unknown for land to be owned by institutions or by landowners who are not immediately available. It seems, therefore, that the occupier of the land is a more relevant person than the landowner.

The requirement that the Masters of Fox Hounds Association must recognise hunts and keep a registration of earth stoppers is unacceptable. That is because there are many hunts—these have been referred to by implication already—including fell packs in the Lake District and packs in Wales, which are all vital for fox control but which can hardly go under the term "packs of hounds" because there are perhaps only two, three or four hounds. These "packs" are not recognised by the association but they must be able to stop badger setts. Their purpose is to control foxes. It is asking too much of the association, however, to undertake a major survey to cover many organisations for which it does not bear responsibility and over which it has no control. It is to ask too much of the association also that it should accept responsibility where it has no jurisdiction.

A registration of earth stoppers would be impracticable. First, there is the difficulty that is presented by the small groups of hounds that might go under the heading of fox hunts. I do not know how it would be possible to keep lists of earth stoppers within their ranks through the Masters of Fox Hounds Association or any other organisation. I suspect that the farmers concerned sometimes ask their friends to go out and help them.

Mr. Ron Davies: I make a suggestion that the hon. Gentleman might find helpful. In Scotland, the Fox Destruction Society is registered with the Scottish Office. In Wales, many of the gun packs to which the hon. Gentleman has referred are established as fox destruction societies. Does the hon. Gentleman think that there would be some merit in having a registration system with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for England,

[Mr. Ron Davies]

or with the agriculture department in the Scottish Office for Scotland or with the Welsh Office for Wales? Perhaps it would be possible to introduce the control structure that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting through that registration procedure.

Sir Charles Morrison: That is an idea which could be pursued. I am not sure whether its implementation would be practical. The hon. Gentleman, knows much more about Wales than I do, but I have a feeling that the procedure would be intensely bureaucratic. I suspect that inadvertently people would find themselves quite often in breach of the law, but it is an idea which would be worth considering in more detail.

Mr. Bowis: I understand that the framing of the provisions to which my hon. Friend is referring was based on current practice and not on conjecture. In Committee, our attention was drawn to the byelaw of the New Forest. It has been shown to work effectively and perhaps we can take that to be the position unless my hon. Friend can present evidence to the contrary. The byelaw states:

"All stopping will be undertaken on the morning of the hunting day only. The Joint Masters shall nominate and appoint authorised stoppers, each of whom shall be fully instructed on stopping requirements, and a list of appointees shall be made available to the Forestry Commission prior to the first Meet of the season."

That byelaw has been shown to work in practice. Perhaps it would not do so throughout the country, but it is a useful example.

Sir Charles Morrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was aware of the byelaw. It may be difficult—I would not put it more strongly—to extrapolate from the limited area of the New Forest to embrace the nation as a whole. The matter can be considered further and dealt with, perhaps, in another place at a later stage of the Bill's consideration.

It is important to stress that it is entirely impracticable for the Masters of Fox Hounds Association to keep a register. For example, the association has no control of gun packs. It is probably true to say that there are fairly regular bands of earth stoppers that act on behalf of the many hunts throughout the length and breadth of England, Wales and part of Scotland. On the other hand, I have no doubt that many of the earth stoppers from time to time ask their friends or mates to help them out if they have a lot of work to do on one particular evening. If the provision is allowed to remain in the Bill, it will inadvertently cause people to find themselves in breach of the law. I should prefer the Bill to be amended in the way that I have suggested.

Amendment No. 15 is concerned with marking. The matter was referred to in Committee. Marking occurs when foxes run to ground either in a fox earth or, more relevant in the context of the debate, in a badger sett. When that happens, the hounds will stand on top of the badger sett, scuffle around and bay. They cannot go down the hole because they are too big. They will stand on top, however, until the huntsmen appear. Sometimes they are unable to arrive at the scene for about two minutes after the hounds have arrived, due to difficulties getting across country, for example. The hounds will not do any harm to the sett, but, as I have said, they will stand on top of it until the huntsmen arrive and call them off.

In some circumstances marking will be an offence, whereas in others it will not. If the damage or disturbance to a sett is neither intentional nor reckless, no offence under the Bill will have been committed. Where the master or the huntsmen could not foresee the risk of marking taking place, they would be safe from prosecution. They may also be covered by the terms of the revised offence that is set out in clause 2, which permits interference with a sett if the action was the accidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably have been avoided. The burden of proof would be on the master or the huntsman, who would have to show that he could not have reasonably avoided his hounds marking out the sett.

The problem will arise when hunts draw coverts or other places in search of a fox, when they know that badger setts are in the vicinity and they know that it is possible, if not probable, that the fox will run to one of the setts and that the hounds will mark the fox to ground. In those circumstances, an offence would be committed.

I emphasise that in the west country, Wales and other areas where both badgers and foxes are highly numerous, that could happen on every hunting day. If masters were to suspend hunting in every place where there was a risk of marking a fox in a badger sett, fox hunting would come to an end. Of course, under clause 3 hunts may stop up the badger setts to prevent foxes from running to ground in them. Hunts do that to the best of their ability, but badgers dig large numbers of holes and, where they are prolific, earth stoppers simply cannot keep up with them. It is inevitable that the foxes will find some hole to run to, and often they will be unstopped setts. Amendment No. 15 would permit interference with a sett by reason of marking with hounds. Masters and huntsmen would be required to take their hounds away from the sett as soon as reasonably practicable.

I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East will favourably consider the amendments. None would undermine the fundamental purpose of the Bill, but they would make clause 3 more practical, because it would then take account of reality.

12.30 pm

Mr. Colvin: I shall be brief in supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). I am pleased that an earth-stopping code has been written into the Bill, even though it is not the code that I want. For what it is worth, the code that has not been written into the Bill—that is, the code used by the Masters of Fox Hounds Association—needed tightening in certain areas. I accept that it is no use those who support fox hunting criticising the Bill if they are not prepared to put their own house in order. That is what the amendments, so expertly introduced by my hon. Friend, would achieve.

On Second Reading, I read out some of the contents of the MFHA code, and the House took the view that it was inadequate because it did not specify in enough detail precisely what people should be allowed or not allowed to do within the provisions of the Badgers Act 1973 or the Bill. In principle, I like the idea of an earth-stopping code being written into the Bill, but in practice I feel that the details have many deficiencies. If the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) is not prepared to accept the amendments, he should have an urgent meeting with the MFHA before the Bill goes to another place. Quite frankly, the only way to reach agreement is to sit around

a table talking to the MFHA; it is the only way to find a solution that is workable, practicable and fair under the law.

The suggestion of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) about an additional register to take in fell packs, gun packs and so on made sense. The Bill's proposal would put too much onus on the MFHA to keep a register. Quite frankly, the idea of a register of earth stoppers is ridiculous. I have been an earth stopper, and most of the workers on my farm are earth stoppers. It would be impossible to keep a register of every earth stopper in the country.

On a day when the hunt is due to come to my farm, the master telephones and asks me to stop the earths. What do I do? Everybody is busy and the farm is under tremendous economic pressure. I grab the first person I see and tell him where to go. That is why it would be good to have a code, and I hope that the MFHA publishes one on a piece of plastic paper that can be distributed to landowners. I could then hand that to the man that I have asked to do the earth stopping and say, "Go and do it George—but you must do it this way or you will be breaking the law." If the Bill can achieve that, it will have done a good job. The hon. Member for Newport, East must accept the impracticability of what he has suggested. If he is prepared to accept the amendments, there will be no problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) mentioned the New Forest and Forestry Commission land. That especially interested me, because the New Forest extends just to my constituency, so I know something about it. In the New Forest and on Forestry Commission land, the conditions for earth stopping are as onerous as those proposed in clause 3. The Forestry Commission's authority to hunt specifies, for example, minimal use of loose soil and that the sides of holes must not be cut or interfered with. However, that is no reason for extending the conditions across the country.

The experience of hunts attempting to meet those conditions has led to concern about the wider implications. Earth stoppers have reported considerable practical difficulties in stopping according to the strict requirements. The most recent occasion on which I stopped a badger's sett on my farm is an example. The sett was situated in chalk, so no soil was available. We need a definition of soil. Is chalk soil? I am not sure. Nothing was available except flintstones. Would they be acceptable under the earth-stopping code? I doubt it. We had a considerable job. We had to journey some distance to get the soil to carry out the earth-stopping job.

The hon. Member for Newport, East must be practical about the implications of his proposals. Perhaps he will accept the amendments. In areas in which setts are far more prolific than in the New Forest, and in which there are many holes, the same stringent regulations would result in many setts being left unstopped. The effect would be a reduction in the ability of hunts to control foxes, with a consequent increase in alternative methods such as snaring, which would be extremely unfortunate for the badger. Badgers can become caught in snares as easily as foxes can. If the fox-hunting control of foxes diminishes, farmers will resort to shooting. That is a most unsuitable way in which to try to control foxes, because it is difficult to shoot a fox with a shotgun.

The Forestry Commission and the New Forest may be able to ensure that alternative methods are not taken up, but that would not be the case elsewhere. It is highly important for the badger that hunting can continue without restrictions. Only hunting ensures that it is only foxes—and not badgers—that are taken. I support the amendment.

Mr. Roy Hughes: We have discussed the amendments at length. The issue of stopping arose in a big way in Committee. Hon. Members will be aware that I made a major concession in Committee and incorporated the code of the Masters of Fox Hounds Association in the Bill. The masters of foxhounds are the experts in the matter, and I was prepared to be guided by them. I appreciate that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) now speaks in reasonable terms and that the hon. member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) has adopted a persuasive approach.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman said that the stopping code of the Masters of Fox Hounds Association had been incorporated in the Bill. Has the hon. Gentleman sat down with the MFHA and talked through the code with it? Is the MFHA in 100 per cent. agreement with what has been incorporated in the Bill? If the hon. Gentleman does not mean that, I hope that he will explain.

Mr. Hughes: I did not intend to be categorical about the matter. The provisions are based on the provisions of the Masters of Fox Hounds Association.

Mr. Colvin: The principle?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, the principle. The provisions were accepted by the Committee.

Amendments Nos. 21 to 23 are essentially technical amendments. We will oppose the other amendments in the group, except amendment No. 15, which we will concede.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Does the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) wish to move amendment No. 7 formally? I imagine that the answer is no.

Mr. Colvin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Your hearing is probably better than mine, but am I right in thinking that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) said that he would accept amendment No. 15? That was certainly my impression.

Mr. Roy Hughes *indicated assent.*

Mr. Colvin: I see that the hon. Gentleman is nodding.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We accept amendment No. 15.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman accepts amendment No. 15, but that comes later. The hon. Gentleman is the sponsor of the Bill and has said that amendments Nos. 21, 22 and 23 are technical amendments. If the House agrees, I shall put them together.

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 2, line 5, leave out 'shall' and insert 'does'.

No. 22, in page 2, line 6, leave out 'shall not be' and insert 'are not'.

No. 23, in page 2, line 8, leave out 'shall be' and insert 'are'.—*[Mr. Roy Hughes.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) accepts amendment No. 15.

Mr. Roy Hughes *indicated assent.*

Amendment made: No. 15, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

'(6) A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 2(3)(a) or (c) or (e) by reason of his hounds marking at a sett, provided they are withdrawn as soon as reasonably practicable.'.—*[Sir Charles Morrison.]*

Clause 4

Amendment of s.9 of Badgers Act 1973

Amendment made: No. 24, in page 2, line 29, leave out 'section 22(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971' and insert

'section 55(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990'.—*[Mr. Roy Hughes.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Newport, East accepts amendment No. 16.

Mr. Roy Hughes *indicated assent.*

Amendment made: No. 16, in page 2, leave out lines 47 and 48.—*[Sir C. Morrison.]*

Clause 5

Amendment of s.11 of Badgers Act 1973

Sir Charles Morrison: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 3, line 12, leave out 'likely occupation or use' and insert 'present occupation'.

We indulged in considerable debate in Committee about the right words to cover what would or would not constitute a breach of the law. The Committee debated two definitions of a badger sett, and, ultimately, the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) was accepted on the basis that we would return to the matter on Report to try to improve the drafting.

As drafted, the Bill will protect badger setts that show signs of

"likely occupation or use by a badger."

This should ensure that abandoned setts are no longer protected. However, doubt remains about the position of setts that are neither occupied by a badger nor completely abandoned. In reality, badgers make infrequent use of subsidiary or outlying setts, so many setts are unoccupied throughout the year. The point was covered by the Nature Conservancy Council report, "The Badger in Britain", which divided badger setts into four types. It made the point that the main setts were those of most importance and that the subsidiary setts were steadily decreasing in importance.

I believe that it is not necessary to protect unoccupied setts. The extensive protection that the Bill affords to setts, coupled with severe penalties should any interference occur, is appropriate only for occupied setts. After all, the purpose of the Bill is to protect the badger, not to protect large numbers of empty holes in the ground.

The problem would be dealt with if the hon. Member for Newport, East accepted amendment No. 17. I do not want to take up any more of the House's time, because the point is clear. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be prepared to make a concession, as he has done so generously on previous amendments.

12.45 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will not accept the amendment. As the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) said, this matter was discussed at length in Committee. The amendment would create a further loophole. If the words "likely occupation" were removed and replaced by the words "present occupation", some clever person would say that there was no badger in the sett at the time: the badger might have been out foraging. That is a technical point, but, as we know, a case could turn on a technicality.

Badgers often leave a sett and return to it a considerable time later—perhaps after months or even years. In certain areas, badger setts go back hundreds of years. In other countries, setts are protected as we would protect our stately homes. The badger sett may be the stately home of the badger, and hon. Members should bear that in mind. Such edifices need to be protected, and the amendment would introduce further loopholes which would imperil the badger sett. Therefore, I ask hon. Members to reject the amendment.

Mr. Soames: I do not want to quarrel with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks); I merely wish to disagree with him. As he will remember, when we considered his Bill this matter was a major point of contention. I should like to quote from a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) from Dr. Stephen Harris, who is an important expert on such matters, as the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) knows. It relates to the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West:

"One problem with the Banks Bill was that it tried to protect every possible badger sett, whether it was a single hole either not currently in use, or a massive main sett. This is not practical, since recognising smaller badger setts for what they are can be very difficult. It is also not necessary from a conservation stand point: most small setts are not in regular use, of little biological importance, and as the NCC's survey showed, most digging . . . occurs at main setts."

That is the opinion of a considerable expert. I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East will bear that in mind when he considers whether to accept the amendment. He has given generous consideration to earlier amendments.

Mr. Roy Hughes: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I intend to stick to my original wording and to oppose amendment No. 17. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) advanced a convincing argument. Badgers often vacate a sett and then return to it later. Without further ado, I invite hon. Members to oppose amendment No. 17.

Sir Charles Morrison: With the permission of the House, may I say a few words in reply to the debate.

I note what the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) has said. In the light of his remarks, I do not intend to press the amendment to a Division. However, the matter will undoubtedly be referred to in the debate in another place, where a solution may be found that is acceptable to both sides. If so, well and good. It is, though, a matter which, as I say, the other House will wish to consider. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Roy Hughes.]*

12.49 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on having done an extremely good job in bringing the Bill before the House. His attitude throughout has been conciliatory. I am very pleased that we have managed substantially to improve the Bill. Much of the credit for that must go to the hon. Gentleman. Credit must also go to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison), who worked extremely hard in Committee to improve the Bill which, as it now leaves the House, is in very much better shape.

Some of us have said today that the Bill is by no means perfect. We still have reservations about certain clauses, most notably about those that we sought to amend on Report. However, as it is much better than it was when it originally came before House, we do not intend to oppose it. I have sufficient of my hon. Friends here today for us to have fought the Bill through to 2.30 pm, had we so wished, but in the same spirit of conciliation as that shown by the hon. Member for Newport, East we decided not to do so. It gives me great pleasure, therefore, to congratulate him once again and to wish the Bill a speedy and successful passage through the other place, with a few more amendments, before it reaches the statute book.

12.51 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) was wise not to pursue the course that he has just described. If he had, there would have been considerable difficulties both for him and others as well as ourselves.

I join the hon. Gentleman—this is one of the few times on which we can agree—in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on steering the Bill through the House. It is almost a good day for badgers. The hon. Member for Upminster knows that I was not so compromising about the proposals that he and other followers of blood sports put forward. I, too, look for improvements to the Bill. They may not be made in another place, but they will come at another time.

I still do not believe that the Bill gives to the badger sett and, therefore, to the badger the absolute protection that is needed. However, my hon. Friend is to be congratulated on having succeeded where I failed. I am delighted not only for him but, more importantly, for badgers. The Bill is a partial success. We shall no doubt return again to the matter and make it a whole success. That is not only what the majority of hon. Members but, far more importantly, what the majority of the people of this country want.

I hope that those Conservative Members who opposed the various badger protection Bills as they went through the House in order to protect their own vile pastime will at least have been impressed by the weight of public opinion. Public opinion has yet again prevailed in this place. Therefore, I am glad to give the Bill my total support.

12.53 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I thoroughly welcome the Bill. It is important, however, to put on record the fact that those of us who have watched the proceedings on badger Bills during the last two years have noted with considerable interest and satisfaction the way in which both sides have moved towards one another. For some it is a highly controversial subject. Last year some tempers began to get frayed. I am a little worried about the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). He seemed to be about to insert yet another unnecessary element of tension into the argument.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) on the way that he has handled his side of the argument. I congratulate, too, both my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) on his contribution and the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), who has piloted the Bill through the House with considerable skill. I wish it well in its final stages.

12.54 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on the Bill and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on introducing the Protection of Badger Setts Bill last year, which unfortunately was unsuccessful. They both succeeded in achieving a major reform for the protection of badgers. In that sense, it is a good day for Brock at last.

It is sad that a Bill to protect a creature as beautiful as the badger must be the subject of negotiation with those who pursue disgusting blood sports. I hope—I am sure that it will not be too long—that a Bill will be introduced to end the awful practice of blood sports.

In welcoming the Bill, the House should pay credit where it is due—to the League Against Cruel Sports and others who have campaigned for so long to protect the badger and other creatures and the thousands of people who have taken the trouble to write to Members of Parliament asking them to support the Bill and encouraging so many to attend the debate. A Bill such as this represents considerable progress and is a step towards a more humane attitude to animals.

I last observed badgers in the constituency of the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). I hope that he will take the opportunity to observe them from the downs above Devizes because he will realise what beautiful creatures they are and why the rest of us want to give them the ultimate protection that other hon. Members seek to deny them because they practise blood sports.

It is a good day for the badger; let us look forward to making it a good day for the fox and hare.

12.56 pm

Sir Charles Morrison: It is a pity that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) was not present for earlier debates, because he would have heard hon. Members emphasising their concern for badgers and their determination to take action that would help to reduce badger baiting.

I warmly thank the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for his co-operation and for the helpful concessions that he made. I congratulate him on getting his name in the history books. I sympathise with his having being burdened with the Bill this year. If there had been a greater feeling of compromise last year, the Protection of Badger Setts Bill would have become an Act. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is still quite a young and likely lad, and as time passes he will realise that, in the House, it is better to be prepared to compromise to achieve the results achieved by the hon. Member for Newport, East.

12.58 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I wish briefly to place on record the thanks of people in Staffordshire to members of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the League Against Cruel Sports, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and constituents who have lobbied me to ensure that I support the Bill today.

It was very important that Conservative Members did not resort to wrecking tactics. There has been a long battle to improve legislation on protecting the badger. I should have liked the Bill to be tighter, but none the less I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on it. People in Staffordshire, constituents at the ICL factory in Kidsgrove, have worked closely with pupils in Staffordshire schools to give wider protection to badgers by developing new computers and software to assist in their protection.

1 pm

Mr. Bowis: This is a good day for badgers and for Parliament because, for once, we have shown that a measure that does not have universal support and which has been proposed by a Back Bencher can reach its final stage in the House of Commons. That is a great tribute to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), and I warmly congratulate him on his stewardship of the Bill.

Some of us have been supporting measures to protect badgers for some time, and to see one achieve success is great news. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison), for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames), whose concern for the balance of the countryside has led them to reach a compromise on the Bill. I hope that that spirit will be reflected in another place so that, when the Bill is discussed there, it will be speeded to the statute book.

Badgers are beautiful creatures and we wish them well. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) referred to their stately homes. From my memory of childhood literature, I thought that the stately home was owned by Mr. Toad of Toad Hall, but Mr. Badger is also welcome to one. If every Englishman's home is his castle, from today every English badger's home will be a protected castle in the earth.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) said that he had been supporting the protection of badgers for a long time. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), who deserves the congratulations of the House and everyone connected with and interested in conservation. It is a pity that it has taken the House 18 years, since the Badgers Act 1973, to introduce such a measure. That Act was revised during the 1974-75 Session and then had to be improved further in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and again when my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) was fortunate in the ballot and devoted his measure to improving the 1981 Act.

However, against the great weight of public opinion, badger baiting continues in the most obscene and sadistic way. If the Bill fails this time, I shall present another to seek to deny those who perpetrate such brutal acts the benefits of anaesthesia, should they require treatment or surgery under the national health service. They deserve a harsh penalty. An obvious further step would be to interpret existing legislation to allow the courts to order the confiscation of the motor vehicles that take them to the setts where they perpetrate their brutal crimes.

The whole House has been involved in the Bill. Although some Conservative Members have expressed reservations about the risk of menace to their activities, I appreciate the fact that they recognise that badgers must be protected further, and the conservation organisations and I are grateful that they have enabled the measure to pass through the House.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East will be long remembered for his contribution to the survival of one of Britain's most attractive species. Hon. Members can go away today feeling that they have done a very good job.

1.4 pm

Mr. Colvin: Anyone witnessing this debate could be forgiven for suddenly wondering whether we had lost our senses. Peace and good will seem to be breaking out all over. It is almost like the time when, during the first world war, the combatants came out of their trenches on Christmas day and, instead of firing bullets at one another, started playing football. Throughout the passage of the Bill we have been playing football. In the best possible spirit, we have joined the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) in trying to find a solution to the legitimate concerns of people engaged in activities in the countryside, including farmers, foresters and field sportsmen. We have gone a long way to finding compromises, but that is largely to the credit of the hon. Member for Newport, East.

Many hon. Members have congratulated the hon. Gentleman on successfully steering his Bill through Parliament. He has succeeded in bringing the Bill to its fifth stage, Third Reading, which I trust the House will give it. But it is only at its fifth stage; it has still to encounter the other place and then return to this place. If we are to believe what we read in the newspapers about the possibility of a summer election, perhaps all the good work that has been done so far will have been in vain. However, I do not believe that, even were that to happen, the work will have been in vain because our debates and the work that goes into them produce a greater understanding of the issues involved. Anyone who reads reports of this morning's debates will understand more about the problems of the countryside and the difficulties faced by those who seek to give the badger the greater protection that it needs. Those problems must be overcome without impairing other perfectly legitimate activities.

As I sat downstairs signing my letters half an hour ago, I saw on the annunciator that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was on his feet. I thought, "Trouble has arrived." For a moment I thought that we were back to the acrimonious debates that we had during the passage of his Bill. It is sad that, at the end of a thoroughly good-natured and constructive debate, the hon. Members for Newham, North-West and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who took no part in today's debates on Report, should come into the Chamber and spoil it. They have added a little bit of sourness to what is otherwise a happy conclusion.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East on his achievement and I hope that we shall see his Bill back

here in a satisfactory state to discuss any amendments passed in the other place and to give it our final good wishes on its way to Royal Assent.

1.7 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on having the patience and persistence to steer the Bill through the House, and the shrewd sense to accept one or two amendments in order to achieve a compromise to allow the Bill to succeed. He has performed a balancing act and obtained the best form of Bill rather than seeing it talked out this morning.

Fridays are valuable for private Members. They provide opportunities for presenting and passing useful legislation. I understand that some yuppie tendencies in various parties in this place have been talking about working until 5.30 pm on weekdays, finishing on Thursday night, and getting home on Friday, which is a nonsensical suggestion. Our debates on the Bill have demonstrated how we can make good use of Friday mornings.

Even in 1973, when the first Badgers Bill was passed, and shortly before I entered the House in 1974 as Member for Keighley, people made representations to me to the effect that there were loopholes in the 1973 Act. Attempts to remedy them failed. When I re-entered the House, with great pleasure, as Member for Bradford, South in 1987 a new group of people repeated the same anxieties to me. Some, if not all, of them supported the League Against Cruel Sports, which has consistently provided information about and campaigned on this issue. Its pressure outside must be recognised as a factor in the successful passage of this Bill.

This legislation has been so important in West Yorkshire that some animal care and preservation societies have suggested that if it had not got through today badgers might well have become extinct in West Yorkshire. The contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East has been first rate——

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cryer: I would rather not. Several other hon. Members want to speak.

This has been a satisfactory morning, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East on the Bill. Most of all, I congratulate the badgers of West Yorkshire on preserving their lives.

1.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I hope that, as one of the sponsors of the Bill, I may make a few brief comments.

I am delighted that today has been such a good day for badgers. I must slightly chastise the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) for the tone that he injected into the debate, but he did the House one service by showing how genuinely difficult it is, with a wide variety of different beliefs about and angles on the subject, to achieve the consensus arrived at today. That, above all, is the measure of the success of the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes).

Secondly, not only is today a good day for badgers but, if the House sees fit, next week will be yet another good week for badgers, as the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and I intend to introduce a Bill known as the Badgers (Further Protection) Bill which I hope will receive its First Reading next Wednesday and go through all its other stages, if the House sees fit, on Friday.

Our Bill should command all-party consent. Its other sponsors include such diverse personalities as my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) and the hon. Members for Newport, East and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). With a cast of supporters like that, the Bill, I feel sure, will win the consent and favour of both Houses of Parliament——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to give us a preview of his later Bill, but he must now return to Third Reading of this Bill.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for reminding me of that.

I hope that the Bill will appear next week. In the meantime, I warmly commend the promoter of today's Bill and congratulate him on his success.

1.13 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I represent an inner-city area and I have had many letters from constituents in support of this Bill. I grew up in the east end, as did my son. Although we made many trips to the Northaw woods to look at badger setts in the hope of seeing a badger, we never had the luck to see one in the wild. I have no doubt that many of the people who have written to me in support of the Bill have never seen a badger either. In some ways it is even more important to them that these beautiful animals should exist in this country, that they should be protected and that men with dogs—fortunately, it is not women who do this—should not be allowed to hunt them in a bloodthirsty fashion that was likely to exterminate them.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on the work that has been done over the years leading to this Bill. I congratulate all who have worked together for the Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friends on bringing the Bill through to its fifth stage, and I hope that it will proceed through its remaining stages and be enacted to protect an important part of the wildlife of our country.

1.14 pm

Mr. Soames: I join in the general spirit of harmony and pleasure in the House and warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on his Bill. The House should also congratulate the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) who for many years has been a leading expert on this matter not only in the House but in the country. His opinions have been widely sought on both sides of the debate, and he has made a notable and important contribution. His approval of the Bill will give further pleasure to the hon. Member for Newport, East.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) injected a sour and rather pointless note into our proceedings. The great achievement of the hon. Member for Newport, East and his supporters in all parts of the House was the ability to recognise the desire for such legislation. There was a vigorous and important public

[Mr. Soames]

lobbying effort about the importance of seeing the badger further and properly protected. Some hon. Members sought to confuse that issue with the issue of field sports, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) spoke.

I commend to the House an admirable article by Dr. Roger Scruton in *The Sunday Telegraph*. I shall quote from the article and direct it especially to the hon. Member for Islington, North. The article states:

"The real motive behind the proposals is not a love for the animal kingdom but a hatred for a particular part, the part that goes by the name of England. This is the ruling passion of today's Labour Party. Field sports involve a blatant assertion of English values, manners, ceremony, heirarchy, easy courtesy, boldness and display, and above all the natural harmony between people from all backgrounds which is so fundamentally obnoxious to those brought up in the belief that the classes are truly at war. No polytechnic-bred lout can witness the pink coats and prancing horses without feeling the urge to pull down the symbols of authority and spit on a piece of England."

Opposition Members may laugh. However, the hon. Member for Newport, East managed to dissociate himself from that perilous, ghastly riff-raff whose interest is not the protection of the badger or anything else. He allied himself firmly and honourably on the side of an animal which deserves and has achieved further protection and enhancement of its habitat. I wish the Bill every success.

1.17 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on persevering with the Bill and on finding ways to get it to the stage at which it goes to another place. I thank him for being kind enough to allow me to be among the Bill's all-party sponsors.

It is a tragedy that the badger is one of those rare animals whose only known enemy is man. I say "man" because to my knowledge its enemies do not include women. When I was with friends in Sussex I was fortunate enough to be within 3 ft to 4 ft of a badger and one of her young and I watched them having supper. It was muesli with apples and they seemed to thrive on it.

I hope that the hon. Members for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames) and others who have been so keen to reach a consensus on this Bill will, next Wednesday, bring that spirit to the Committee considering the Hare Coursing Bill, which is being promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). I also hope that, after the next general election, when the Labour Government introduce a Bill to abolish all forms of hunting with hounds, on a free vote, those hon. Members will again strive for consensus.

As has already been said, the Bill is, regrettably, neither the end of the matter of adequate protection of badgers nor of animal welfare and wildlife matters. I hope that the one thing on which we can all agree, and on which we can all send a message to the other place as it considers the Bill, is that we need to build on this until we can truly say that we properly treat the animals with which we share this planet.

1.20 pm

Mr. Gale: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) is right to say that many other animal welfare matters will require our consideration. I have the honour to be the vice-chairman of the all-party animal welfare group, which concerns itself deeply with, for example, the export of live horses and with whaling. On both those matters, Her Majesty's Government have taken a strong and correct stand.

It gives me pleasure to see the passage of the Bill, because the all-party group has given the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) support throughout the stages of the Bill. I know that the chairman of the group, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes) and all its members wish him well as the Bill completes its stages. It is also appropriate for me, on behalf of the group, to thank the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and its officers for the advice and help that they have given us in reaching a consensus. The officers of the National Farmers Union have been similarly helpful.

It saddens me that a note of acrimony was introduced into the debate. It is easy to criticise, but those of us who listened to the articulate debate can only have been impressed by the knowledge of the countryside shown by those of my hon. Friends who have not supported the cause that we have supported. We should not forget that many of those engaged in farming or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) pointed out, in forestry and other country pursuits do a great deal for the conservation of the countryside. It is easy to be hypocritical about such matters. Often, when those who shout the loudest about animal welfare from the town move into constituencies such as mine, they do infinitely more harm to animal welfare, through either negligence or vandalism, than do those whom they have been criticising. I have never hunted or wanted to hunt and there is no likelihood that I ever will, but I recognise, and the House should recognise, and not deride, the strongly held beliefs expressed this morning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside made it clear that this is but the fifth stage of the Bill. I hope that today will be seen as a good day for badgers, but the Bill has to complete its stages in another place and come back here. I trust that, when all those stages have been completed, we shall be able to say that we have afforded badgers more protection.

1.23 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes: This is a happy day for me. It has been a privilege to promote a Bill which will protect these wonderful creatures. My thanks are due to all those right hon. and hon. Members who have supported me. My thanks are also due to those who, in opposing some of the provisions of the Bill, made their arguments lucidly. This is, after all, a democratic institution.

My gratitude and thanks are due especially to animal welfare organisations, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Nature Conservancy Council, the World Wildlife Foundation, the National Federation of Badger Groups and the League Against Cruel Sports. They have been enthusiastic throughout and unstinting in their efforts.

Arguments have been advanced throughout our discussions and they have been answered. Certain

concessions have been made and now the Bill is to go to another place. I hope that efforts will be made speedily to ensure that the Bill can soon be put on the statute book.

1.25 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): As the House will know, on occasions such as this the Government always maintain a strictly neutral stance. That has been the position that I have held during the Bill's passage and its consideration on the Floor of the House and in Committee. It would not be right, however, at this stage of its progress to allow the Bill to go forward without offering to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) my congratulations on the way in which he has skilfully drawn the arguments together and taken the Bill—privately, I am happy to see it reach its present stage —through the House.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have co-operated with and participated in an important measure. I am happy to have had the opportunity to express my personal position. I look forward to the advance of the Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) has announced that he and the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) will be bringing forward further to help and support badgers.

1.27 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I join in the congratulations to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on the passage of the Bill. It is an example of the compromise that can be reached on the Floor of the House. It is the result of a great deal of work behind the scenes in which, I am sure, the representatives of both sides of the argument have participated. They have succeeded in reaching agreement.

The hon. Member for Newport, East said that the badger has no enemies in this place. I am sure that many of us have received more letters about badgers than about the Gulf war. It is clear that the country is behind the Bill —I am certainly behind it—and I am glad that we have reached this stage in its consideration. Let us hope that its progress will not be stopped by a general election and that it will be brought to a successful conclusion. Certain small amendments may have to be made to it in another place during its constitutional passage, but I am sure that we shall support any improvement that can be made to the Bill.

1.28 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I join all hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on the passage of the Bill, I extend some credit to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who I know was disappointed by the failure of his Bill last year. I am sure that he will be extremely pleased by the progress so far of the Bill before us.

Throughout the eight years that I have been an hon. Member we have seemed to spend many hours discussing the welfare of badgers. We have now arrived at a splendid Bill which I hope will shortly receive its Third Reading. I know that some of my colleagues have reservations about the precise details of the measure, and I have no doubt that those in another place will, in their wisdom, ensure that all the concerns which have been expressed during our consideration of the Bill are met.

Many of my constituents love badgers. Tonight, I shall be joining the badgers at the bottom of my garden in celebrating the passage of the Bill. The toast will be, "The hon. Member for Newport, East."

1.29 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I am delighted to add thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for the hard work that he has undertaken in seeing the Bill through to its final stage here before it goes to another place. I add my thanks to those that have been expressed by the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) to those who have worked extremely hard on another Bill that is shortly to come before the House. The measure is intended further to help and support badgers. I thank the Minister of State for the sign that she has given that it will receive Government support when it comes before the House next week. I hope that it will complete all its stages.

I congratulate all those who have been involved in the Bill, from both sides of the House. Like all those who remained in London today to try to help the Bill through its last stages, I think that we have gained a tremendous boost for those in British society who care about the animal kingdom. Such Bills as this can only be good for the whole of society.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Gaming (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF SECTION 31 OF THE GAMING ACT 1968

Amendment proposed: No. 1 in page 1, line 11, after 'premises'. insert

'(other than bingo club premises as defined in section 20 of this Act)'.—*[Mr. Favell.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this we may discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 14, leave out 'three' and insert 'two'.

No. 3, in title, line 3, after 'on', insert 'certain'.

No. 4, in title, line 4, leave out from 'Act' to end.

1.30 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): The Committee that considered the Bill did some very good work in improving its provisions. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) now seeks to undo that good work. The amendments that were carried in Committee were modest in their impact. They would allow working men's clubs and social clubs to have three jackpot machines instead of two, as under existing law, and commercial bingo clubs to have four instead of two.

Those of us who voted for the amendments in Committee believe that what is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander. We wholeheartedly rejected the assertion of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that jackpot machines were part of hard gaming and that if members of our working men's clubs put 20p in a slot in the hope of winning the princely sum of £150, they were going down the slippery slope to hard gambling. We thought it a nonsense then, and we think it a nonsense now.

I am sorry that the Home Office appears to have taken the rather prickly view that, because it did not agree in advance that further provisions should be included in the Bill, it will resist them. I should be sorry if, as a result of that, the changes in respect of casinos—which my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport supports—must be rejected by the House.

Speaking for myself and for the clubs that I represent as joint chairman of the all-party group on non-profit-making members' clubs, I cannot accept the amendments that my hon. Friend is trying to make to the Bill, as amended. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will join me in the Lobby to defeat them.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I wish first to declare my interest as consultant to the Bingo Association of Great Britain.

The amendments counter the two amendments that were passed in Committee. One of the problems is that the whole area of gambling was set out in legislation by a previous Government, and any attempts to amend it have been left to private Members of each House. We all know the difficulties of conducting private Members' business through both Houses.

It became clear in Committee that the Government have, quite correctly, very strong views and that they feel that the Bill touches on fundamental matters. I ask the Government to appreciate that if they take such a strong hand, the time will come when they must consider legislation on gaming as a whole so that the provisions can be put together. It is not entirely satisfactory that we have to rely on the luck of the draw for private Member's legislation, with all the perils of its passage through the House, when the Government take a firm line and have a clear policy.

The bingo industry has no wish to wreck the Bill. The industry accepts that the casinos are perfectly entitled to put forward their arguments—which we have not heard this afternoon—about why the number of gaming machines or one-armed bandits should be increased. However, it is important that other sections that are affected by the legislation should also reconsider their position. The Bingo Association of Great Britain initially felt on balance that, although it would have liked an increase in the number of machines, it did not want to object to the Bill.

However, because we believe that it is important to work closely with all the others affected, we talked to the representatives of the clubs. It was decided that if the clubs were likely to seek to increase the number of machines in their premises, the Bingo Association should reassess its view. I am entirely in favour of the clubs supporting such an amendment. They are right to do so in their own interests. In some clubs, the pressure on the two gaming machines is intense and income from the machines may be important to the survival of the club.

I find it difficult to understand why we seem to get on the hook of believing that it is perfectly moral to have two machines, but immoral to have three or four. I know that it could be argued that once there are three or four, one can then increase the numbers. We do not ask for that. The amendments tabled in Committee were specific. They sought one extra machine for clubs and two extra for bingo halls.

I also made the point in Committee that, funnily enough, the increase in the number of machines would bring little benefit to the larger clubs owned by big groups such as Bass Leisure or Rank. The vast majority of those clubs prefer to use an alternative machine whose numbers can be increased by an application to the local magistrates.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. There seems to be a working-class versus middle-class approach. If one is an Arab, or one has a bow tie or a long frock on —Opposition Members know my views on this—one goes to a gaming club in central London where there are many one-armed bandits. It is different if one belongs to a bingo club or to a working men's club, as people do in my constituency. What is the thinking behind that? What sort of nonsensical attitude are the Government showing on the issue yet again? Surely they should say that we are all equal or, better still, they should give more facilities to people in working men's clubs and bingo halls who are ordinary working-class people. The Government should say to the people with bow ties or long frocks in the gaming clubs in central London that they do not need all the machines because they have more money to use on the gaming tables instead.

Mr. Fry: My hon. Friend, as usual, puts his point of view graphically and I agree with most of what he says. However, his question should be addressed to our right hon. Friend the Minister rather than to me.

After the amendments had been agreed in Committee, the Bill would have increased the number of gaming machines in bingo halls. That would not have been taken up in the large halls and by the most prosperous companies in the industry.

The section of the industry that is concerned is that which is most at risk. I refer to the small clubs, often in small country towns where there may not be any alternative entertainment or relaxation for people who like to go to bingo halls, and who do not like to go to pubs on their own. That especially applies to ladies who are over 40 years of age and who enjoy a flutter in a bingo hall. Various studies have demonstrated the social value of bingo halls to that section of the community. When the Government accepted my Gaming (Amendment) Act 1987, which established the National Game a few years ago, they recognised that point.

If the clubs that are at most risk financially are not given some form of extra encouragement, they will tend to go out of business, and this type of social activity will disappear in some areas. The Bingo Association of Great Britain merely wants a level and fair playing field. I hope that the Government recognise the differences between the various sectors of gambling. If they do not and they state that they are all the same and that the law will not be revised, they should not be surprised when amendments such as those accepted in Committee are tabled.

It is perfectly proper for the casinos to make their proposals and for the clubs to do likewise. If those proposals are accepted, the bingo industry is fully entitled to ask for equal treatment. That was the basis of our amendment in Committee and that is why it was accepted.

I do not wish to wreck the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell), but I hope that he understands that I cannot support his amendments. Having won the argument in Committee, I should at least stand by the amendment that I tabled then.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): I declare my interest as a member of the all-party clubs group.

The amendments tabled in Committee were generous to the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell). As has been already stated, all that we sought from the Government was fair and non-discriminatory treatment between the clubs, bingo halls and casinos. It is incomprehensible that the Government could not accept those amendments, which were tabled in good faith and accepted by a substantial majority in Committee, as the hon. Member for Stockport would concede. The Government's reasoning in Committee seemed fallacious—that the casinos should be treated differently from clubs and bingo halls for no apparent or justifiable reason. The Minister argued that the recommendations came from the Gaming Board and that the board was prepared to accept an increase in the number of one-arm bandits in casinos.

On behalf of the clubs committee, we registered the majority of our clubs under the Industrial and Providence Society. If it is argued that the Gaming Board supports the application for an increase in the number of one-arm bandits in casinos, we could argue that the Industrial and Providence Society would equally like an increase in the number of one-arm bandits in clubs. They should be given equal status.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): A classless society.

Mr. Turner: Exactly. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, as did the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks). Discrimination exists, and working men's clubs, as well as Conservative, Liberal and Labour clubs and bingo halls where people go for a little pleasure—who can deny them that—should be treated equally so that they can have the facilities that they want.

Even at this late stage, I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government are prepared to treat all those important entertainment institutions with equity, so that the legislation can be passed to benefit all the interests that we have mentioned. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government have relented and want to treat everyone fairly. We can then get the legislation through and help the important institutions that we support.

1.45 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): May I say at the outset that I have no interest in the British Casino Association. The Bill was introduced by Lord Lisle in another place, and that is why I am dealing with the matter here. Like many punters in casinos, bingo halls and clubs, I am in a no win situation. I have much sympathy with the views of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr. Watts), for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks). He made a sensible intervention, as usual.

I have been to casinos—although I do not think that I have ever won—and they are not confined to the nobs. I have seen people from all walks of life playing blackjack and even baccarat, and other games the rules of which I do not understand Casinos are the only places in which people can indulge in hard gaming. There are only about 100 in the United Kingdom. That is why the Gaming Board for Great Britain does not object to an increase in the number of fruit machines in gaming casinos.

The Gaming Board was set up by the Government when the Gaming Act 1968 was first introduced. It has carried out its functions extremely well. It was feared that the Mafia could come into the country if gaming remained underground or was not supervised properly. I have never heard any criticism of the Gaming Board and the way in which it discharges its functions. Therefore, the Home Office is bound to take its advice seriously.

The Minister will no doubt confirm that the advice of the Gaming Board is that it is all right for people to engage in hard gaming in a gaming casino. These days, the jackpot from a fruit machine is £250, which is not peanuts. It believes that elsewhere they should be restricted to the present numbers, because otherwise young people and others might be drawn into gambling. I am not an expert on this matter, but the Gaming Board is, and that is its view.

I am obliged to introduce the amendments to reverse the changes made in Committee, not because I do not have sympathy with what has been said, but simply because the Bill will fail otherwise. I have seen Home Office Ministers on a number of occasions and it has been made clear to me that either we accept two more fruit machines in the gaming casinos and no more elsewhere or the Bill will fail. It is as simple as that. Let us have half a loaf, which is better than none. I ask my hon. Friends to come back next

[Mr. Tony Favell]

year with amendments to deal with premises that are not devoted to hard gaming to see whether they can persuade the Home Office and the Gaming Board.

Mr. Turner: The argument about young people playing the machines was not advanced in Committee. The Government would not have used that argument because they would have been perfectly aware that if one wants to become a member of a club of the kind that we are talking about, one has to be 18 or over. Therefore, the argument about youngsters playing the machines is irrelevant.

Mr. Favell: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I am not an expert. He may be right, but one goes into a gaming casino for one reason only—to indulge in hard gaming. When one joins a cricket, golf, working men's or even a Labour party club the main reason for doing so is not, I hope, to play the fruit machines or to indulge in gambling.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): The Government very much welcome the amendments proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell). He is absolutely right when he says that the Gaming Board for Great Britain was set up under the Gaming Act 1968 to consider such proposals as the increase in the number of jackpot machines. What is in question here is gaming machines. It is, therefore, right that the Gaming Board's role should come into play.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) asked about how strongly the Government feel about the matter. He also said that if the Government feel so strongly about the amendments that he tabled in Committee, they should reconsider their stance on gaming. That may be a reasonable request, but at present we are considering this Bill. Therefore, the Government are simply putting forward the view that to amend the gaming laws in this way would be unsatisfactory.

Mr. Fry: I trust that the Government would take a similarly sympathetic view about sensible moves to reform the gaming legislation if a private Member's Bill should be introduced.

Mrs. Rumbold: It would be up to my hon. Friend to bring forward such suggestion, if he so wished. I do not intend to pre-empt the view of any future Government, but I am sure that they would look carefully at such proposals, if they were made.

As for the point made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), the argument that the Government advance is that which influenced the Rothschild royal commission on betting and gaming when it considered the question of casinos versus working men's clubs, bingo clubs and Conservative party clubs. It is not a question of having one set of rules for one type of person and another set for another type of person. The fact is that casinos are different and should be treated differently from bingo and other registered clubs. That fact is underlined by the different regulations, which provide, appropriately, for a different allocation of jackpot machines.

Mr. Turner: I accept the contention that casinos are different, in the sense that hard gambling takes place on roulette tables, but I do not see how one can make the case that they are different in terms of one-armed bandits. All one-armed bandits are identical, whether they stand in a casino, a bingo hall or other club. The people who go into casinos do not put their money into one-armed bandits. They go in for the hard gambling on the roulette tables. I repeat, however, that the one-armed bandit is the same, wherever it stands. That is the best argument, therefore, for treating them all in the same way.

Mrs. Rumbold: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Casinos in Las Vegas have serried ranks of jackpot machines for hard gambling, whereas people use clubs for different reasons—possibly to take their children or to meet friends—but not for the sole purpose of hard gambling. Jackpot machines in those clubs are restricted, but their principal purpose is not an attraction but very much an aside.

Mr. Turner: The machines are identical—they all take 10p coins. One does not spend £5 on a machine in a casino but only 10p in a club. It is wrong, therefore, to differentiate between machines. I have never been to Las Vegas, but the cost of playing machines there may be graded. If a machine in a casino cost £5 to play but only 10p in a club, I could understand the Minister making a distinction, but that does not arise. The machines are the same and the cost is the same, so why not treat them the same?

Mrs. Rumbold: The Gaming Act 1968 provides for two types of gaming machine—jackpots and amusements with prizes. The latter, with their low stake and maximum cash prize of £2·40p or non-monetary prizes of £4·80p, are much more appropriate for clubs and bingo clubs. The maximum prize on jackpot machines is £150. That is hard gaming. There is a difference between clubs and casinos. Bingo is a comparatively soft form of gambling, but there is no doubt what people do at a casino, which is different from the kind of clubs that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East is talking about. One cannot make a comparison; nor can one say that there is discrimination because people can choose where they wish to go.

Therefore, the Government welcome the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport to reinstate the original provisions of the Bill, whereby casinos will be allowed four jackpot machines instead of two and clubs such as bingo halls and other working men's clubs will be restricted to two.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I am afraid—I think that the House will share this view—that the Minister is wholly unconvincing. The Government are right to be cautious about increasing people's ability to gamble. I acknowledge the special problem of gambling addiction among extremely young people.

The so-called amusement arcades in many high streets are not members of an association or federation and are badly supervised. I wish that local authorities had far more powers to refuse or to refuse to renew licences.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)—he insists on calling his constituency Bilston, which describes it more accurately—goes to the nub of the problem. He said that fruit machines are the same wherever they are. I accept the Minister's distinction between bingo halls and casinos. Like her, I do not frequent casinos—I may have been in one or two in my life when I have been on holiday—but I cannot believe that someone who crosses the threshold of

a casino does so merely to play on a fruit machine. As the Minister said, people go there for hard gambling. They may not use the machines while they are there, but that is not the point of the amendment.

2 pm

The Minister overlooked the fact that supervision in bingo halls and clubs is not just good but fierce. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East has great experience of that, as do some other hon. Members. I do not mean to criticise that supervision. In my constituency there is an ex-service men's club. I wish that it was a club for everyone who has been in the services, but that is another matter. The security at the entrance to that club is first class. It not only has cameras, but somebody is always on the door to ensure that only members are allowed in. No one could quarrel with the fact that that club is well supervised. I have no doubt that, if youngsters were seen spending a long time and a lot of money on fruit machines—their parents might have gone for a quick snorter so that the children were not properly supervised —responsible members of the club's committee would intervene and talk to the parents.

Although it would not usually be wrong for the House to overturn decisions taken at Committee stage, it would be so in the case of this Bill. Although I was not party to it, there was an extensive debate aimed at achieving equality of treatment for different gambling places. We have not persuaded the Minister about that. I never thought that I would agree with the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) and he doubtless reciprocates that feeling, but he is dead right on this matter. It may be an accident of history—the Act went on the statute book in 1968—but behind the Gaming Board for Great Britain is a hint of suspicion that we are legislating against working people who cannot be trusted as much as the sheikhs who can be found in casinos tonight while Kuwait burns and whose standard of living has not changed a jot or tittle since the dreadful invasion of that country. Gambling places should be treated equally and I am sorry that the Minister denies that. I hope that the House will not support the amendments.

Mr. Dicks: I find myself in a strange position. We are almost back to the philosophy behind my speech during the arts debate.

The Home Office Ministers and those who advise them have probably never been in a working men's club or sat in a bingo hall. I have been to many such clubs, including the Conservative club in Hayes and Harlington, and, many years ago, I was a bingo caller. Those who go to such places are average people.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Gentleman is in good company because I too used to be a bingo caller—clickety click, 66.

Mr. Favell: I have also been a bingo caller.

Mr. Dicks: I was going to say, "Legs 11, two little ducks —quack, quack."

This is a serious matter for all our friends in the clubs and bingo halls. Why cannot ordinary people who go to bingo halls to play bingo, and who might want a break between one game and another, spend a couple of bob trying to win £250? The same should apply in working men's clubs. It annoys me greatly that my right hon. Friend the Minister does not seem to realise that the people in their bow ties and long skirts do not go to play machines in casinos, but for hard gambling. The machines are just an afterthought, along with the coffee and double Scotch that they have when they cannot get a table.

Knowing that the Prime Minister talks of a classless society—we all accept that—how can my right hon. Friend the Minister give us a class-ridden argument? Why can the Arabs and everybody else go to the best parts of London such as Mayfair and gamble to their hearts' content, but a little old lady who spends £1 to go in and play bingo cannot put another 50p into a one-armed bandit machine?

Mr. Watts: 20p.

Mr. Dicks: As my hon. Friend says, why cannot that little old lady spend 20p? Why cannot those who use the Hayes and Harlington conservative club have the same opportunity as those using casinos? Why do they have to wait?

If my right hon. Friend the Minister is going to argue, she should talk with knowledge and understanding of the position and bear in mind that we are not all from the middle and upper classes. We do not all have first class degrees from Oxbridge and sit in the Home Office giving advice; we are ordinary, working people. We are talking about ordinary, working people—the Prime Minister is an ordinary, working chap. He talks about the classless society. My right hon. Friend the Minister should listen, accept what is happening and allow the ordinary clubs the same facilities and consideration.

Mr. Fry: Does my hon. Friend accept that the argument put forward by my right hon. Friend the Minister about Las Vegas can hardly apply to working men's clubs and bingo halls when we are talking about an increase of only one or two machines? The position is slightly different.

Mr. Dicks: I agree that there can be no comparison. When my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned that issue I wondered where she had gone in the United States and whether she could name a bingo hall or a working men's club in America. The advice that my right hon. Friend the Minister has received is bad advice. Her comments to the House have been uninformed and class ridden, and I hope that she will reconsider.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I should like to jump on the same bandwagon as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks). I am little upset by some of this morning's suggestions relating to amendments, particularly those made by the Minister. How many times are examples given in this pace of what is done in Europe, Japan and America? I am bothered about what we do here. That should be our first consideration. Other places have the same problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned clip joints. I have never been into one of them, but I have heard about the goings on in them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) talked about security in some places and having to look after this, that and the other, and ensure that everything is all right. But the bandwagon of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington is the correct one. The Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and talked about a classless society. The measure creates a two-tier society—with one thing for the workers and one thing for the big nobs.

Mr. Skinner: This is all about opted-out one-armed bandits.

Mr. Haynes: My hon. Friend can always come up with the right suggestion or comment straight off the top of his head.

I am surprised that the Prime Minister talked about a classless society not all that many days ago, and then the Minister stood here this afternoon and went in a different direction. It would seem that the Government are not together——

Mr. Corbett: Another split.

Mr. Haynes: Quite right. One half of the Cabinet wants to go to the country, the other half does not. One half wants one-armed bandits in the Cabinet room, the other half does not. They do not know where they are going, do they? But we are here to put them right.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East. Members served on the Committee and did all that hard work and now, in a few moments, the Government are trying to destroy it. We are not going to have it. We will vote on this one——

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend knows only too well that if there were a couple of one-armed bandits in the House of Commons on a Friday they would not make a deal of money.

Mr. Haynes: I hope that the Minister will not take up that idea. They are talking about having televisions sets in different rooms. If that happens, no one will come in here, and if one-armed bandits are installed Members will not come in even on a Thursday, let alone a Friday. Some of us, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover and for Wolverhampton, South-East, try to come here regularly, but other hon. Members will be spending their time on the one-armed bandits. We cannot have that. I hope that the Minister will ignore that suggestion and will listen to our serious suggestions. I even hope that she will go into the Lobby with us now.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 21, Noes 43.

Division No. 140] **[2.11 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Buck, Sir Antony
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Favell, Tony
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Ground, Patrick
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sims, Roger
Tredinnick, David
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Nicholas Bonsor and
Mr. John Bowis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bermingham, Gerald
Bottomley, Peter
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fry, Peter
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Gordon, Mildred
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hardy, Peter
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holt, Richard
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Meale, Alan
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Nellist, Dave
Neubert, Sir Michael
Norris, Steve
O'Hara, Edward
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Watts, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

2.21 pm

Mrs. Rumbold: It may be helpful if I put the Government's view on the Bill. We saw the proposal in the Bill, as originally drafted, to increase, from two to four, the number of jackpot machines permitted in casinos as a modest one which fits well within the established framework of gambling in this country.

I may be helpful if I set out briefly the provisions on gaming machines. These machines are regulated by part III of the Gaming Act 1968. The Act provides for two types of gaming machine—jackpot machines, which are the subject of this Bill, and amusement-with-prizes machines, that is, the common fruit machine. As their name suggests, amusement-with-prizes machines are primarily intended for amusement, not for gambling, and are therefore widely available, for example, in pubs, amusement arcades and cafes. In fact, there are some 193,000 such machines, the majority of which are located in pubs, as most hon. Members will know. The emphasis on amusement is reflected in the modest prize that may be won—£2·40 in cash or £4·80 in tokens—the low stake-prize ration which is only 1:12 in the case of the cash prize, and in the prize structure, which deliberately provides for a non-monetary prize significantly greater in value than the cash prize.

Jackpot machines, on the other hand, provide for a much harder form of gambling and are therefore confined to casinos, licensed bingo clubs and members' clubs and miners' welfare institutes registered under the Gaming Act 1986, and anything else registered under the Act. In each case, the Act limits the number of machines to two. There are some 40,000 jackpot machines in circulation—240 in casinos, 400 to 500 in bingo clubs and some 39,000 in registered clubs. Confining these machines to members' clubs, where the public do not have direct access, reflects the nature of the machines. The character of the machines as hard gaming machines is also reflected in the size of the prize—that is £150—which serves to encourage play, the high stake-prize ration of 1:750, the rapidity of play and the absence of any restraints on the length of play. Indeed, although the maximum stake is only 20p, many machines accept a £1 coin for five games, so it is possible to spend relatively large amounts of money in a short time. As many hon. Members will know, it is also possible to become addicted to this form of gambling.

As long ago as 1978, the Rothschild royal commission on gambling concluded that it was anomalous for premises expressly set aside for hard gaming to be treated on an equal footing with, for example, a village cricket club. By way of remedy, the commission adopted the proposal put

forward by the British Casino Association that a casino's entitlement to jackpot machines be linked to the number of gaming tables, and recommended a ratio of one machine for every two tables. Such an arrangement is, in our view, no longer practicable.

Mr. Turner: Will the Minister tell the House whether it is the Government's intention to talk the Bill out and not allow us to vote on Third Reading?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be interested in the Government's reasons for wishing to support the Bill in its original form. If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I should prefer to continue with what I have to say.

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is disgraceful. My hon. Friend the member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) asked the Minister whether she was talking the Bill out on behalf of the Government. We can see and we know what is going on. The Minister did not have the decency to say yes or no to my hon. Friend. I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you should challenge the Minister to answer the question. It is an extremely important Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The Minister is in order, and that is the sole concern of the Chair.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is normal on Fridays for private Members' Bills to be enacted. Back-Bench Members bring Bills before the House, of their own accord, to be passed. Sometimes, as we all know, Bills can be talked out, especially on a Friday, but it is unusual for the Government to use Ministers to stop Bills. There have been many occasions when Back-Bench Members have done that, but it has not been done by Ministers. Today, it seems that the Government are intervening to prevent the progress of a Bill that they supported. They do not like it because they have been defeated in a Division, and they have the cheek to talk about democracy. The Bill was considered in Committee and it was reported. The Government wanted to change the Bill—it must be remembered that this is a private Member's Bill—and, because they cannot get their own way, they have decided, it seems, to talk it out. It is an unusual practice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Points of order are taking up time. It would be better if the Minister were able to get on with her speech.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is important that I explain to the House why the Government feel relatively strongly about the Bill.

The royal commission's recommendation was made when gaming duty was assessed partly on the number of gaming tables, and casino proprietors were under no obligation to notify changes in the number to Customs and Excise. Duty is no longer assessed on that basis. Since 1984, it has instead been assessed on the basis of a casino's gross gaming yield, that is, the amount staked less winnings. Subject only to the available gaming area or any undertaking given the licensing justices, there are now no controls on the number of gaming tables; as a result, entitlement to jackpot machines could vary without notice as a casino proprietor increased or decreased his complement of gaming tables.

The solution adopted by the British Casino Association, to increase the entitlement to four machines per casino, overcomes this difficulty. Furthermore, by maintaining a reasonable upper limit on the number of machines, the Bill avoids the Las Vegas-style serried ranks of jackpot machines, which were opposed by both the Rothschild royal commission and by the Gaming Board for Great Britain, as alien to the character and atmosphere of casinos in this country.

The Bill, as originally drafted, quite rightly in our view, maintains the existing limit of two machines for premises other than casinos which are permitted to use jackpot machines. I am referring, of course, to licensed bingo clubs and registered clubs. Such premises are not intended primarily for hard gaming, and so are in many respects less tightly regulated than are casinos. This is particularly true of registered clubs and miners' welfare institutes as I was at pains to point out earlier today. Indeed, a case can be made for removing members' clubs' entitlement to jackpot machines on the grounds that the 1968 Act provides inadequate controls of these clubs. To obtain a licence under the Act, the proprietor must first undergo searching scrutiny by the Gaming Board; the licence is up for renewal annually and there is year-round supervision by the board inspectorate, paid for through a substantial renewal fee.

Registered clubs have no such regime. The grounds for refusal of registration are closely circumscribed, and registration lasts for five years. That relative absence of control on registered clubs opens up the possibility of fiddling. The Rothschild royal commission identified three possible means of fiddling:

> "(i) The mechanism of the machine may be interfered with to give a lower rate of return than that specified by the manufacturer; or to give an increased rate of return for a short time to stimulate play. Alternatively, a symbol on a reel may just be altered to decrease the chance of a player winning a prize. Those 'adjustments' are not difficult to make but very difficult at present for a player to detect."
>
> (ii) Someone with——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 17 May.

Private Members' Bills

FORESTRY BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Read the Third time, and passed.

EDUCATION (PUBLICATION OF EXAMINATION RESULTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 July.

NATIONAL AUDIT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (STREET LIGHTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The Bill has not been printed, so I decline to put the Question.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 May.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 May.

RESERVE FREE TRAVEL SCHEME (LONDON) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, so I decline to put the Question. No day named.

BAN OF IMPORTS (CHILD LABOUR) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 June.

GAMING MACHINES (PROHIBITION ON USE BY PERSONS UNDER EIGHTEEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

NATIONAL ENTERPRISE (RECONSTRUCTION) BOARD BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, so I decline to put the Question.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 July.

RIVER SAFETY BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 June.

VALUE-ADDED TAX (OVERCHARGING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCILS BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, so I decline to put the Question.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

GARDEN SUPPLIES (SUNDAY TRADING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 May.

LEASEHOLD REFORM BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

FORESTRY COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, so I decline to put the Question.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

TRADE DESCRIPTIONS (ANIMAL TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

PARISH COUNCILS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

COAL IMPORTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

HOSPITAL SCHOOLS IN LONDON BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 June.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 15th May, the Motion in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Education may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock, and if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question necessary to dispose of them.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 131 (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [7th May] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Women (Labour Market)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.34 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having the opportunity to raise the most important issue of women returning to work. Women throughout the country will be aware of the irony that, on the day when most hon. Members return from work to their homes, it is necessary for me to delay going home for a further day to raise the most important issue of how women can play their full part in the working environment.

It is also a timely occasion on which to raise the subject because the Prime Minister is about to make a speech—and may already have done so—on a charter for citizens. To what extent has the whole issue of women's rights been incorporated in the Prime Minister's charter?

In a week in which we have heard from an ex-Prime Minister that

"Home is where you come to when you have nothing better to do",

this is a timely occasion on which to raise the issue of women returning to the labour market. I suspect that many women, like myself, want to do their full duty to their children, to their families generally and to their homes and at the same time want an opportunity to continue to work or to return to work with the full rights and benefits that are achieved by our counterparts in other European countries. The issue must be given greater political priority.

It is also a timely occasion on which to raise the issue because on Tuesday I had the great privilege officially to open an exhibition that was organised by the equal opportunities advisory sub-committee of Staffordshire county council in partnership with the training and enterprise council in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent city council. It was an absolutely magnificent initiative, taken by the Labour-controlled council on behalf of women in Staffordshire. The point of the two-day exhibition, which was called "New Directions", was to encourage women to start to take back their places in the work force.

I have nothing but praise for the chair of that sub-committee, Councillor Pauline Brownless, because of the way in which she, together with her partners, organised the two-day exhibition. Just as she is asking women in Staffordshire to take on new directions, it is only right that I, as a woman representative of Staffordshire, should raise the issue. Now is the time to say that we have good representation by women in Staffordshire. I am thinking especially of my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) and for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal). If the county council, despite cuts in local authority services, is raising the issue, it is time that the Government gave the highest political priority to women returning to work. What is done in Staffordshire can be done only with the full backing of Government.

The issue is important in terms not only of women wanting to achieve their full potential by returning to work or to avoid living in poverty, but of the current demographic trend. We have information from the National Economic Development Office which shows that, by 1995, 80 per cent. of those returning to work will be women. There will be a net increase of 80 per cent. in

[Ms. Joan Walley]

women returning to work. The current recession may create some slight delay to that trend. In Staffordshire, the current recession has caused many people to be thrown back on to the unemployment queues. None the less, it is important that the county council did not abandon the two-day exhibition because of the recession. The county council recognises that, despite the recession, we have to plan long term for the needs of women.

I will outline for the Minister's benefit what Staffordshire council and its partners, the TEC and the city council, did. It had a two-day exhibition which was well supported by local industry, by local businesses, by local voluntary organisations and, not least, by the services of Staffordshire county council, such as the fire services, and by the environmental health department of the city council. All those departments give women their full part in terms of higher management positions. They do not merely keep them doing menial, low-paid tasks.

Child care was available for the women who went to the exhibition, which included seminars, information and advice on training, enterprise and employment throughout the day. Flexible opening hours meant that it was possible for women to fit attending the exhibition into their schedules whether they were at home or at work. Every woman with a child at school in the city received an invitation to the event. It was advertised on a huge scale.

If more women are to become involved in public life and in the workplace, the first thing is to recognise that we must convince ourselves—and this includes female hon. Members—that we have the confidence to take the next step forward, whatever that may be. The exhibition was therefore about confidence-building for women.

It was not a two-day exhibition which, once held, would never be heard of again; there is to be a follow-up. The county council is to evaluate fully the issues that arose. Having brought together leading people from industry, local authorities and local voluntary groups, there will now be a group of people to monitor and assess the needs of women locally to improve the desperately needed facilities. That co-ordination to ensure that whatever is needed is provided does not exist at Government level.

In Staffordshire, we wish to press forward with a number of issues. We want flexible working hours, job-sharing schemes, work-break schemes and term-time contracts. Any woman who holds down a job knows that that is difficult when the children go to school because half-term holidays, school holidays and so-called "Baker days" make nonsense of any arrangements that might have been made. We want child care centres for the under-fives and—the Government referred to this some time ago but, to my knowledge, little came of it—a facility whereby children can stay in the school buildings and be properly looked after until their parents finish work. The initiative of the North Staffordshire health authority is a good example. It has a scheme for children who are on holiday which fits in with their parents' shifts in the hospitals. That makes a great difference to women who want to return to work and a great deal of economic sense bearing in mind the shortage of and the difficulties in recruiting women back to the work force.

We also wish training to be improved. Our adult training budget in Stoke-on-Trent is completely inadequate for the needs not just of the city but of the whole of Staffordshire. I was distressed to receive a letter from the Staffordshire training and enterprise council, which stated that it would be failing in its responsibilities to the local community if it did not set out the implications for its adult programme of the reductions in the budget that it receives from the Government. About 600 training places have been terminated and people who had been taken on to conduct those training responsibilities have been made redundant. That is not the way to get women back to work.

I should also like to draw attention to the booklet produced by the Minister's Department, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94". One has to search the document very hard to find any reference to gender. I could not find any direct reference to gender or equal opportunities or any help for women wishing to return to work.

Not only far-sighted Labour-controlled authorities and the local partners who joined in Staffordshire county council's venture have women's interests at heart. It is clear to me from my limited research that some companies assist women who wish to return to work. One such company is ICL, in Kidsgrove in my constituency, which has a large manufacturing plant producing mainframe computers. It has issued a policy statement, "Women's Employment in ICL", and it recognises that the development and retention of existing skills within the work force is important.

Many professional associations, such as the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, have published booklets and given advice and information to women to encourage them to return to work. Many trade unions, such as the Ceramic and Allied Trade Union in Stoke-on-Trent, have women's officers to encourage women who are returning to the work force.

By contrast, the Government's commitment and proven track record is worrying. There is still no woman in the Cabinet. Britain has the worst maternity pay rights in Europe. There is no reference to gender in the statement from the Department of Education and Science, or in the Government's expenditure plans for the Department of Employment. The Minister should tell us why there is no concerted, co-ordinated attempt to ensure that women's interests are properly taken into account when policies are made.

This problem applies to all Departments. The Department of Health is rightly being criticised at the moment. Rather than just giving advice on retainer schemes in the public sector, it should have required such schemes to be introduced. I tabled questions at the beginning of the week to find out the Government's view. It was inconvenient because I had to go from one Department to another, not knowing which one had responsibility for what. I wonder how we can find out who is monitoring and evaluating the introduction of retainer schemes in not only the public sector but the private sector.

Many issues need to be raised, such as part-time work, maternity rights and minimum wage protection. It is scandalous that some women work for only £1·25 per hour as contract clearners and 52p an hour as homeworkers. The Government cut training instead of planning a strategy to enable women to top up their skills and return to work. There is fragmentation and a lack of a coherent strategy.

There is still a clear distinction between girls' subjects, boys' subjects and integrated subjects in schools.

Discrimination, no matter how inadvertent, begins at school and may affect future career decisions and act against women.

The women in Staffordshire who sampled the huge feast of opportunity that was laid on by a partnership of local authorities need Government backing to be able to return to work. The educational and training needs of women are linked with those of the economy. A woman should not be forced to choose between the children whom she loves and the work that she would like to do. In contrast to the Government, the Labour party has a charter for working women. Only when those women who attended the New Directions fair return to work with equal rights, pay and opportunities, and help with child care and looking after dependent relatives, will we have a Government who are prepared to equal the commitment made by Staffordshire county council.

We do not want decision makers who are out of touch and who pay lip service to women's hopes of fulfilment. We want a co-ordinated strategy and a full charter for women who, as citizens, make up more than 50 per cent. of the population. In the absence of a combined Government strategy, I look forward to hearing from the Minister exactly how he believes that the hopes, aims and ambitions of women in north Staffordshire can be achieved.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) on raising this important issue. I think that she will find that there is common ground between the parties in all parts of the House about its significance. She made a wide-ranging speech. I may not succeed in doing so, but I shall try to take up all her points.

Women make a crucial contribution to this country's economic wealth. More and more women are, as we know, entering the labour market or, just as importantly—this was one of the themes to which the hon. Lady referred—rejoining it after having had families.

Let me start with a few simple facts. The hon. Lady mentioned the European Community context. Britain has the second highest participation rate for women in work in the EC, at 61·7 per cent. Only Denmark outranks us, with 75·2 per cent. of their women being economically active. There are, however, more women in employment in the United Kingdom than in any other European Community state. In fact, 44 per cent. of our labour force are women. There are 12 million women in Great Britain who are economically active, and a quarter of small business owners are women. That is a very impressive set of facts. The hon. Lady was inclined on some points to be somewhat critical of the Government's record and of our achievements in Britain, but those facts suggest that we cannot be doing so badly if we compare them with the performance of other countries.

Why has Britain done relatively well in encouraging the employment of women? The most important factors are, I believe, economic. They have to do with the operation of the market and market forces. That will be the main theme of what I have to say. In fairness to ourselves, however, we must recognise that both local and central Government have played their part in this achievement. I am very happy to join the hon. Lady in congratulating Staffordshire county council on what sounds like an excellent and interesting initiative, which I wish well.

The Government's view, however, is that the most important factor in achieving progress for women's employment lies in the creation and development of a competitive economic environment that encourages job creation. That has been the main thrust of Government policy over the last 10 years. Women have taken full advantage of it. In fact, two thirds of the growth in the size of the labour force between 1984 and 1990 was accounted for by married women. We believe that one of the most important features of the past 10 years has been the growth of enterprise in the United Kingdom, which has led to a significant culture change in the role and participation of women in the economic life of the country.

We think that self-employment, which has grown enormously under this Government, has a particular appeal for women who want to combine financial independence and career satisfaction while responding—as the hon. Lady said that they should and must—to the ever-changing needs of their families. There has been a vast growth in the numbers of women choosing the self-employed option over the last 10 years. In 1979, there were 373,000 women in that category. In 1990, there were more than 800,000. Women now comprise a quarter of all self-employed people, with more than 200,000 having staff of their own.

The hon. Lady may think that this is an excessively economist interpretation of the way that progress can be made in female employment. I can assure her that the Government believe that political and legislative action has its place, though I think that there may be some difference between the parties on the importance of political and legislative action. The hon. Lady may, I believe, attach exaggerated weight to the concepts of co-ordination and strategic planning and to the development of political and governmental machinery. I am not sure that that is the way forward for women.

The hon. Lady recommended that the Government accept the concept of the minimum wage, but that would be detrimental to female employment. She must accept that if she imposes burdens on employers in relation to certain categories of employees, employers may not give them jobs. She may set out with the best of intentions, but their effect may be to damage people's opportunities.

The Government are fully committed to the principle of equal opportunities employment and to the legislation that gives effect to it. We have continued to work in that spirit. We removed, in the Sex Discrimination Act 1986 and the Employment Act 1989, the outdated restrictions on the hours that women can work and on the work that they can do. They are free to compete equally with men for higher paid jobs, including shift work.

The hon. Lady referred to training, in which it is important that Government play an active part. More than 60,000 women are being trained under employment training. The hon. Lady was fairly critical of developments in employment training. I have corresponded with her and she understands the shift that we have been trying to make between employment training measures and employment service measures to help unemployed people through the job clubs and the job interview guaranteee scheme. However, those 60,000 women being trained on ET are much more than was achieved by the previous Labour Government. In 1979, only 24,000 women were trained

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

under TOPs. Although adjustments are being made, they are from a much higher base than the Labour party achieved in government. More than 350,000 women have been trained since the launch of ET in September 1988, and a higher proportion of new trainees are women than when it began.

Ms. Walley: Many issues have been raised, but the Minister is overlooking my point about the importance of ensuring that women are able to participate in projects that enable them to get back to work. In 1989, Mrs. Kay Jackson, who was married with three children, was offered a place on employment training but was unable to take it because her allowance and her husband's salary would not have covered the costs of child care. The Government changed the Employment Protection Act 1975, and a case of discrimination that was upheld was subsequently reversed because of that change. That leads me to think that their commitment to equal opportunities is not as straightforward as the Minister suggests.

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Lady knows that there is a time limit on the debate and that responding to her intervention will make it more difficult for me to respond to her speech. I was about to deal with the role of the training and enterprise councils and their flexibility in, for example, payment of child care allowances.

One of the most important developments in training has been the creation of the training and enterprise councils. I am glad that the hon. Lady mentioned them favourably and that there is co-operation between Staffordshire county council and the TEC to which she referred. We have given TECs a clear message in our strategic guidance about the growing importance of women in the work force. The plans of TECs show awareness of that, not only in their main training programmes but in the enterprise allowance scheme, whereby more than a third of enterprise allowance scheme support is given to women, and that has doubled since 1982.

Staffordshire TEC runs a course, mainly for women, to help to inform career choices. It is running short courses for women returners, often with creches, it has contributed to returners' day exhibitions and it has applied for funds for returners from the European social fund, which is rather innovative. There are several other examples of what TECs are doing, such as the issuing of women returners' newsletters, the setting up of returners' units by Essex TEC, action in Thames Valley TEC for retraining women in sales and marketing and action by Tyneside TEC, East Lancashire TEC, the Heart of England TEC and the Hertfordshire TEC.

A great deal is being done by TECs in different ways to promote the opportunity for women to return to work. However, as I said in response to the hon. Lady's intervention, the Government are setting a flexible framework for TECs to decide the real needs of women returning to work in their areas. We are allowing for women returners to enter employment training, even though they may not have been registered as unemployed. That is an element of flexibility. We are allowing part-time training and have given TECs greater flexibility in the payment of child care allowances while retaining the principle that child care allowances are mandatory for the long-term unemployed who need it under the Government's guarantee.

Another crucial subject to which the hon. Lady referred was working practices. Ultimately, the question of the opportunity for women to return to work will be largely determined by what happens in the workplace, particularly employers' policies. The hon. Lady mentioned many ways in which employers can adapt working practices to make it easier for employees—men as well as women—to combine work and family responsibilities, such as job sharing, career breaks, part-time work, using new technology, and so on. I am happy to join her in paying tribute to ICL in that context.

The Government believe that it is for employers to judge what best suits their circumstances. Many employers are taking a lead in adopting flexible working practices. For example, the civil service , which is a major employer, is setting a good example by spreading good practice. My Department will shortly publish a booklet that will illustrate working examples of innovative schemes and the benefits that they have brought to employees and their families.

I note what the hon. Lady said about child care. The Government believe that employers should be encouraged to recognise that child care assistance for their employees is an important way to recruit and retain the staff that they need. That is best done by voluntary action to ensure that employers find an appropriate way to match their needs with parents' requirements for child care. The Government's role is primarily regulatory to ensure higher standards, but we have been encouraging additional provision for good quality child care—for example, through the concession in the 1990 budget to exempt employer-provided nurseries from tax. That exemption goes wider than is often appreciated. It extends beyond the workplace—a fact which is often misunderstood—to nurseries run by employers at the workplace or elsewhere, and to nurseries run by employers jointly with other employers, voluntary bodies or local authorities. The provision is flexible and should be more widely taken up.

Comparisons are often made between this country's performance on child care and that of other countries in the European Community. We have a different pattern of child care provision, with a greater mixture of private, public and voluntary sector provision for children of all ages, and we do not do too badly. The strength of our variety is reflected in the fact that about 86 per cent. of three and four-year-olds in Britain are in education and day care, which places us near the top of the European league table of comparisons.

I hope that the hon. Lady referred to part-time work, because it is one of the most important areas of opportunity for women returners. Its growth was one of the most striking phenomena in the 1980s. It has increased by 34 per cent. since 1983 and is often a welcome form of flexible work for women who want to combine work with family responsibilities. It will be an increasingly important option in the 1990s. Research by the Confederation of British Industry suggests that 80 per cent. of women who wish to return to work in the next five years will look for part-time work. The labour force survey that my Department conducts shows that a high proportion of women who work part time do not want a full-time job.

Indeed, only 7 per cent. said that they did. The evidence shows that the vast majority of part-time workers work part time because they prefer to do so.

The hon. Lady did not mention the European Community's part-time and temporary work directives, which fall under the heading of some of the well-intentioned political and legislative actions that can be detrimental and damaging. They would increase the financial and administrative burdens on businesses, especially small ones, which is why we are resisting those proposals——

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put.*

Adjourned at four minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 29 April 1991

NATIONAL FINANCE

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing reconciliations for England, Scotland and Wales between local authority current expenditure as in table 5.8 of Cm. 1520 and the respective aggregate expenditure for grant purposes in successive revenue/(rate) support grant orders.

Mr. Mellor: Following the changes to the local authority finance system, data are no longer held in a form which makes it possible to provide the information requested, except at disproportionate cost. For most years, figures for current expenditure have changed only very slightly from those given to the hon. Member in response to the similar question he asked on 20 July 1990.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis for the years 1984-85 to 1993-94, in as far as practicable in the same format as table 5.1 of Cm. 1520 of aggregate external finance of local authorities, showing *(a)* changes between table 21.4.3 of Cm. 1021 and table 5.3 of Cm. 1520 and *(b)* changes between table 5.3 of Cm. 1520 and the "Financial Report and Budget Statement" 1991-92.

Mr. Mellor: The information is set out in the table below. It is on the same basis as the information on differences from Cm. 1021 presented in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement—that is, it excludes differences arising from changes in the way expenditure is recorded (classification changes) or from transfers between departments or sectors (for example, switching responsibility for expenditure from central Government to local authorities). Figures for 1985-86 and 1986-87 are unchanged. Corresponding analyses of differences between the supplement and the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" are not available. Details of changes since the supplement arising from the community charge reduction scheme and the measures announced on 17 January to reduce the levels of community charges are set out in table 5.2 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Differences in aggregate external finance between the 1990 public expenditure White Paper and the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement

£ million

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*[2]
England						
Revenue Support Grant		−70	−27			
Non domestic payments	31	108	115		1,617	1,990
Magistrates courts				27	19	30
Commonwealth Immigrants				30		10
Probation and aftercare			1	20	19	30
Police			34	62	138	230
Education Support					54	50
In-service teacher training				5	−47	−50
Administration of Housing Benefit[3]				5	15	20
Area Protection Grant[4]				2	10	40
Other grants			−40	40	52	50
Total	31	38	84	191	1,876	2,400
Scotland						
Revenue Support Grant			9	16		
Non domestic rate payments					268	260
Urban programme			−3	−6	1	
Police			4	−12	2	
Administration of Housing Benefit[3]				1	2	
Other grants				1	9	10
Total			11	−1	282	270
Wales						
Revenue Support Grant						
Non domestic rate payments					138	80
Police			−3	4	7	10
Other grants			1	3	4	
Total			−3	7	150	90
Total Great Britain	31	38	92	197	2,308	2,770

[1]The differences shown are differences after adjustments for changes of classification and switches between departments and spending sectors.
[2]Figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million.
[3]Including Community Charge benefit administration.
[4]Including low rateable value areas grant.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis using the economic categories of table 5.6 of Cm. 1520 of the differences in the years 1984-85 to 1993-94 between the

levels of local authority self-financed expenditure underlying *(a)* table 21.4.11 of Cm 1021 and table 5.11 of Cm. 1520 and *(b)* table 5.11. of Cm. 1520 and the "Financial Report and Budget Statement" 1991-92.

Mr. Mellor: Local authority self-financed expenditure is simply the residual between the level of local authority expenditure (and projections for future years) and the level of central Government support for local authorities (plans for future years). Differences in the levels of local authority self-financed expenditure therefore simply depend on changes in local authority expenditure itself, and in central Government support. Levels of local authority expenditure are shown in table 21.4.6 of Cm. 1021, and table 5.6 of Cm. 1520; differences in the level of central Government support are set out in a previous answer to the hon. Member on 18 April 1991 at column *259*.

Retail Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for the period since 1 January 1986 and for the decades 1980-90, 1970-1980 and 1960-1970, the average annual percentage increase in the retail prices of *(a)* goods other than food and fuel, *(b)* other goods and services and *(c)* housing.

Mr. Mellor: The following table gives the available information.

Retail Prices Index

	Average annual percentage increase			
	January 1986 to March 1991	*January 1980 to January 1990*	*January 1970 to January 1980*	*January 1960 to January 1970*
Goods other than food and fuel and light[1][2]	5·0	5·8	12·5	3·5
Food, fuel and light and services	4·6	5·7	14·5	4·0
Housing	12·8	11·9	13·5	5·1

[1] Includes vehicle maintenance, tax and insurance prior to 1974.
[2] Including the cost of meals out since 1968.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing *(a)* the amount invested by United Kingdom manufacturing industry in plant and machinery in 1970, 1973, 1979, 1985 and 1989 at 1985 prices, *(b)* the amount invested per person employed in manufacturing industry in each of those years and *(c)* the nearest comparable figures for France, Germany, Italy and the United States of America in each case.

Mr. Mellor: The following table provides the available information for the United Kingdom, from the annual census of production. In this case, net capital expenditure means capital purchases net of sales.

Investment figures derived from the annual census of production differ slightly from those published in the United Kingdom national accounts because of differences in definition and coverage.

There are no directly comparable data available for other countries. OECD publishes comparisons of investment incurred by industry groups, but not for plant and machinery alone.

Net capital expenditure in plant and machinery in manufacturing industry at 1985 prices in the United Kingdom

	Total £ million	*£ per person employed*
1970	7,903·7	983·9
1973	6,665·9	862·0
1979	8,031·3	1,159·6
1985	6,881·2	1,383·0
1988	8,845·4	1,793·4

Notes:
1. Orders III to XIX of SIC(68) up to 1979. Divisions 2-4 of SIC(80) for later years.
2. The latest available census year is 1988.
3. From 1988, in line with accounting practice, assets leased on a finance leasing basis are included as assets by the lessee rather than by the lessor. This is estimated to have increased total United Kingdom capital expenditure in 1988 by up to 8 per cent.

Source: Annual Census of Production.

Tobacco

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much he expects imports of each tobacco product to increase as a result of the changes in tobacco taxation he announced in his Budget Statement; and if he will show the increases by percentage and by value for each manufactured product and indicate the country of origin by percentage and value.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The aims of the increases in tobacco taxation announced in the Budget statement include an overall fall in tobacco comsumption, both of United Kingdom manufactured and imported tobacco products to which the increases equally apply. It is too early yet to predict the impact of the tax changes on individual classes of tobacco products, let alone by country of origin.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much he expects the sale of each home-produced tobacco product to decline as a result of the changes in taxation of tobacco products he announced in his Budget statement; and how many jobs he expects will be lost in each of the counties of the United Kingdom as a result in the present financial year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is estimated that consumption of tobacco products will be about 4 per cent. lower in 1991-92 as a result of the increase in taxation of tobacco products announced in the Budget statement. Reliable estimates are not available for individual products. I cannot predict the impact of these tax changes on jobs in the tobacco industry; this will depend on a wide range of other factors.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of trade with the rest of the European Community in manufactures, including erratics, on a balance of payments at current prices for 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 April at column *468*.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Central Office of Information to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Details of fees paid by the Central Office of Information to management consultants for years 1979-80 to 1988-89 were given in the answer at column *168* on 13 March 1990. Figures for the years 1989-90 to 1991-92 are as follows:

	£
1989-90	71,181
1990-91	[1]Nil
1991-92	[2]Nil

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Treasury; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is as follows (budgeted complement given in brackets):

Staff in statistical divisions[1]

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Unified grade 5[2]	2(2)	2(2)	2(2)	2(2)
Unified grade 7[2]	8(8)	7(8)	8(7)	7(6)
SEO	4(4)	3(4)	2(3)	2(2)
HEO	5(5)	4(5)	5(6)	6(6)
Senior assistant statistician/ assistant statistician	4(4)	3(4)	4(4)	4(5)
EO	10(11)	10(11)	12(11)	11(12)
AO/AA	13(13)	15(13)	14(14)	13(13)
Total	46(47)	44(47)	47(47)	45(46)

Notes: Consistent information, in the form required, is not available before 1988-89 and could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

[1] Defined as divisions headed by grade 5 chief statistician and employed mainly on statistical work. There are other statisticians posts in Her Majesty's Treasury which are not included in the above figures.

[2] At the senior levels of the service, where management forms a major component of most jobs, there are service-wide common pay and grading arrangements. These unified grades 1 to 7 are known as the open structure and cover grades from permanent secretary level to grade 7 level. Within the unified grades there are no formal barriers to movement between former occupational groups, eg scientists, administrators, statisticians etc.; each post should be filled by the person best equipped in terms of skills, ability and experience.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Central Office of Information; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Maples: The Central Office of Information has not had statistical divisions or staff in statistical posts for the years in question. There are no proposals for any such appointments in 1991-92.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by the Central Office of Information on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Details of the cost of the press office of the Central Office of Information for 1979-80 to 1988-89 were given at column *166* on 13 March 1990. The costs for 1989-90 are as follows:

	£
1989-90	46,612
1990-91	[1]57,240
1991-92	[2]54,740

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

ENERGY

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given on 21 July 1988, 13 March 1989 and 12 March 1990 (at columns *833-36*, *19* and *4* respectively) for the information relating to 1979, 1984, 1988, 1989 and 1990. I regret that information about complements and for staff in post in the intervening years is not available; the position as at 1 April 1991 when there were no vacancies is:

Grade	*Staff numbers*
Statistician grades	
Chief Statistician	1
Statistician	5
Assistant Statistician	2
Sub-total	8
Economist grades	
Senior Economic Advisor	2
Senior Principal Economic Advisor	1
Economic Advisor	8·5
Senior Economic Assistant	2
Economic Assistant	1

Grade	*Staff numbers*
Sub-total	14·5
Senior open structure and Administrative grades	
Grade 3	1
Grade 7	1
Senior Executive Officer	5
Higher Executive Officer	7
Executive Office	13
Senior Personal Secretary	1
Administrative Officer	8
Personal Secretary	4
Sub-total	40
Total	62·5

THE ARTS

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the objects and property accepted in satisfaction of inheritence tax during the financial year ended 31 March; if, in listing these, he will specify *(a)* the amount of tax satisfied in each case, *(b)* whether any offers of objects carried conditions as to destination, *(c)* the dates in each case of the recommendations received by him from the Museums and Galleries Commission for the acceptance of objects, *(d)* the total for the financial year of the tax thus satisfied and *(e)* how much of this total was covered in the public accounts by means of resort to the Reserve in accordance with Government policy as announced on 26 July 1985, *Official Report,* column *779*; and whether a press notice will be issued by the Office of Arts and Libraries making available the complete list of acceptances during the financial year which is covered in his reply.

Mr. Renton: The information the hon. Member requests is as follows:

Item	*Tax satisfied £*	*Date MGC recommendations received*
*Beachey painting[1]	360	—
Collections of works by and relating to John Piper	137,918	17 October 1989
*Photographs by and of Cecil Beaton	125,331	16 June 1990
*Old master drawings by Mirola Barocci, da Cortona and Reni	64,490	2 May 1990
*Two Raeburn Portraits	48,439	18 June 1990
Painting by Sickert	84,000	25 October 1990
Shudi Harpsichord	35,000	19 June 1990
Collection of Post Office and Telegraph Stamps	113,000	16 August 1990
*Collection of paintings and a George III cabinet	211,522·80	6 September 1990
*Collection of paintings and drawings by Runciman	196,000	15 February 1991
*Portrait attributed to Reynolds	20,000	12 April 1990
A collection of musical instruments	126,956	11 January 1991
A collection of papers relating to George Greenough	26,600	11 January 1991
Watercolour by Whistler	7,000	11 January 1991
*Two paintings by Nasmyth	56,000	19 June 1990

[1] Additional payments for offer accepted in 1989-90.

Notes:

Those offers marked* carried conditions as to their destinations.

The total tax satisfied in the financial year 1990-91 was £1,252,646·80. There was no recourse to the Contingency Reserve for acceptance in lieu in 1990-91.

Press notices have already been issued announcing the acceptance of all these items except for the portrait attributed to Reynolds. An announcement on this will be made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, in due course.

TRANSPORT

Motorways (Lighting)

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what would be the cost of lighting all Britain's motorway network.

Mr. Chope: The estimated capital cost of lighting the present network in England is in excess of £250 million. The estimated running costs in energy and maintenance would be approximately £30 million per annum.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made in reducing drink driving *(a)* generally and *(b)* among what were the prime target groups.

Mr. Chope: Considerable progress has been made in our continuing campaign against drinking and driving in changing public attitudes and so reducing the number of road accidents caused by those who drink and drive. In 1980, 32 per cent. of drivers and riders killed in road accidents, whose blood alcohol level was known, were above the legal limit. By 1989 this had fallen to 19 per cent. Among the target groups over the same period this proportion fell from 25 per cent. to 11 per cent. for the 16-to-19 age group and from 41 per cent. to 24 per cent. for the 20-to-29 age group. The reduction has been less marked for older drivers and our campaign has been broadened to address drivers in their early middle age.

HGV Speed Limiters

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incentives he intends giving to road hauliers to fit speed limiters to heavy goods vehicles on a retrospective basis.

Mr. Chope: None. Many operators have voluntarily fitted speed limiters so as to save fuel and reduce maintenance costs and have found this investment to be well worth while.

LRT

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the authorised capital investment for London Regional Transport in each of the past 15 years.

Mr. Freeman: For the six years 1985-86 to 1990-91, the information is as follows:

Authorised level of capital investment

	£ million cash
1985-86	184
1986-87	273
1987-88	305
1988-89	365
1989-90	486
1990-91	580

We have no comparable data for prior years, when London Transport was under GLC control. Actual capital investment in those years was as follows:

LT Investment/Capital Expenditure

	£ million cash
1976	74
1977	64
1978	66
1979	100
1980	123
1981	147
1982	127
1983	168
1984-85[1]	240

[1] 15 month financial year

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 April to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, what are the technical difficulties relating to the day trains for direct services from the channel tunnel to cities north of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from British Rail that there are two main problems. One is the need to avoid the risk of electrical currents from the locomotives interfering with the signalling. The other is the adaptation of the inter-capital train sets, which are too long for stations north of Peterborough and Rugby, so that they have a driving cab in the middle of the train and can be split to operate as two separate trains, while preserving the other characteristics of the train sets. British Rail is investigating with the manufacturers how best to overcome these difficulties and will seek the earliest possible delivery date. As an interim measure, British Rail is examining the possibility of running a few InterCity services from Scotland and the north of England direct to Waterloo to provide a better connection with the inter-capital trains.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish an analysis showing (i) for the years 1981-82 to 1989-90 grant-related expenditure analysed by standard region; (ii) for the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 total standard spending and standard spending assessments analysed by standard region (iii) for the years 1981-82 to 1991-92 aggregate Exchequer finance analysed by standard region and (iv) for the years 1981-82 to 1991-92 central Government support analysed by standard region; indicating whether this analysis is consistent with section 5 of Cm. 1520;

(2) if he will publish tables showing *(a)* an updated version of the then Secretary of State's written answer of 30 November 1987, *Official Report*, columns *417-18*, concerning the scale of inter-regional transfers through resources equalisation for the years 1981-82 to 1991-92, but identifying separately the contribution of the domestic and non-domestic sectors; and *(b)* a parallel inter-regional analysis of needs equalisation measured against a benchmark of equal per capita distribution;

(3) if he will publish an analysis, consistent with the totals for England and Wales in table 5.2 of Command 1520, showing (i) an analysis by class of local authority within standard region of the 1990-91 community charge safety net (ii) an analysis by class of authority within standard region of the low rateable value areas grant/area protection grant for the years 1990-91 to 1993-94 and (iii) an analysis by class of authority within standard region of transitional relief for the years 1990-91 to 1993-94.

Mr. Portillo: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place the associated tables in the Library.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year from 1967-68 to 1991-92 the aggregate grant percentage for rate revenue support grant;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis for the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 for each county and district council, London borough and for England as a whole *(a)* the total standard spending and standard spending assessment, *(b)* the total standard spending and standard spending assessment expressed as pounds per capita, pounds per adult and pounds per community charge unit, *(c)* the community charge required to be levied to finance standard spending assessment, *(d)* the "long-run" community charge required to be levied to finance standard spending assessment, *(e)* the "long-run" community charge required to be levied to finance expenditure 1-5 and 10 per cent. below and 1-5 and 10 per cent. above standard spending assessment, *(f)* the proportion of total expenditure which would be financed by government grant at each of the spending levels specified in *(e)* above, *(g)* that level of expenditure as a percentage of standard spending assessment which would require a zero community charge and *(h)* that level of expenditure as a percentage of standard spending assessment which would require a zero "long-run" community charge;

(3) if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis showing for each English local authority, for each class of local authority, for each standard region and for England as a whole *(a)* grant-related expenditure in 1989-90, expressed in pounds and pounds per capita, *(b)* standard spending assessment in 1990-91 and 1991-92, expressed in pounds and pounds per capita, *(c)* the difference between grant-related expenditure in 1989-90 and standard spending assessment in 1990-91, expressed in pounds and pounds per capita and *(d)* the "long-run" cost of the difference in *(c)* above in pounds to be met by community charge payers and the effect in pence on the community charge.

(4) if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis for the years 1966-67 to 1990-91, as far as is practicable consistent with table 1.1 of "Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics No. 14, 1990", of rate fund services revenue account but which also distinguishes *(a)* non-domestic rate revenue from domestic rate revenue and *(b)* gross rates, net rates and rate rebate grants.

Mr. Portillo: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place the associated tables in the Library.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was spent by local authorities on the provision of speech therapy in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Key: The vast majority of spending on speech therapy is carried out by health authorities. The relatively small amount of spending by local authorities is not separately identified on their returns submitted to the Department of the Environment.

Local Government Boundaries

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the statements or speeches made by, or on behalf of, Ministers of the Crown *(a)* prior to July 1987 and *(b)* since covering any major review of the functional organisation of boundaries of local government.

Mr. Key: Over the 158 years since the setting up of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations of 1833, which can be regarded as the first major review of the functional organisations and boundaries of local government, many speeches and statements have been made by, and on behalf of, Ministers of the Crown. The most relevant to the current situation are the statements made by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Wales and for Scotland on 21 March and 22 April at columns 401 and 901.

Electricity Pylons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has commissioned or published in the last 10 years in respect of the effect on health of electromagnetic radiation from electricity pylons.

Mr. Baldry: Matters relating to the possible health hazards from environmental radiation are the concern of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. However, my Department maintains close liaison with the Department of Health on these issues.

Residuary Bodies

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total capital sum realised from the abolition of the metropolitan county councils and the winding up of the residuary bodies.

Mr. Key: One hundred and seventeen million pounds of capital receipts realised from the sale of surplus property and other assets were distributed by the metropolitan residuary bodies, excluding London, to local authorities.

Quarries (Waste Disposal)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number and sites of quarries in County Durham used for waste disposal from industrial and domestic sources.

Mr. Baldry: The Department does not have information on the number of quarries which are used for waste disposal. Durham county council, as waste disposal authority, should be able to provide the information on waste disposal sites in its area.

Rural Development

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to promote the achievements of Rural Development Commission projects in the rural development areas, in particular those using funds provided from central Government.

Mr. Baldry: My colleagues and I take every opportunity to publicise the achievements of the Rural Development Commission, as does the commission itself. For example, on 19 April my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside launched a project in Rossendale, Lancashire, which is part of a new partnership between the Rural Development Commission and Help the Aged aimed at addressing the needs of elderly people in rural areas.

Article 4 Direction

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now give a decision in response to the application by the Caradon district council for an article 4 direction in respect of land at St. Veep which the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East first referred to his office on 22 August 1990.

Mr. Yeo: I have written to my hon. Friend explaining that delay has been caused by awaiting additional supporting evidence which the district council has offered to provide. Officials in my Department have written to the council about this again on 15 April. I assure my hon. Friend that once this additional evidence has been received, or the council confirms that it does not intend to submit anything further, we will issue a prompt decision on the article 4 direction.

Council Tax

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the aggregate external finance will be for each local authority under the illustrative council tax and what is the AEF in payment for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: With the council tax, grant and business will be paid directly to each tier of local authority. It is therefore not possible to make direct comparisons with external finance in 1991-92 which is paid to the collection fund in each area.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each local authority the average illustrative council tax bill per household; showing the average community charge bill per thousand in 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The Government issued on 23 April full information on the illustrative effect on household bills had the council tax been fully in place in 1991-92.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his statement to the House on 23 April, *Official Report*, column 901-3, what is his policy towards the removal or otherwise of the safety net from those local authorities which will attract more Government grant than at present as a result of the proposals outlined by him on that occasion.

Mr. Key: The illustrative figures published on 23 April assume that the present area protection grant will be distributed in the same way as the remainder of AEF.

The Government propose that there will be transitional relief to ensure that no household will face an unreasonable increase in its bill from one year to another as a result of the introduction of the new system. There will therefore be no need for transitional arrangements applying to whole local authorities.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the figures and calculations which result in Grimsby's local government tax bills in each column of his illustrative tables being among the 10 highest in the country.

Mr. Key: The illustrative figures are calculated on the basis of a distribution of grant and non-domestic rate income which allows local authorities in all areas to set a council tax of £400 for a band D property occupied by two or more people, if they provide a standard level of service. The corresponding figures are £267 for a band A property and £668 for a band G property.

All spending above the standard level falls upon the council tax. Humberside county council spends 4 per cent. above its standard spending assessment and Great Grimsby spends 32 per cent. above its SSA, leading to higher bills in the area than those for standard spending.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the correlation in his illustrative bills table in the new council tax between the percentage over standard spending assessment and size of charge in each band.

Mr. Key: All revenue in excess of standard spending assessment will fall to be raised by the council tax for the local authority concerned. Within the area of an authority, the increase in bill for a band G property will be two and a half times that for a band A property. The size of increase required for a 1 per cent. increase in spending will depend on the SSA for the authority and the proportion of properties in each band.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his statement to the House on 23 April, *Official Report*, columns 901-903, if his review of local government will include the metropolitan districts.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend to the House on 23 April at column 901, in which he said that the Government intend no significant changes in the structure of local government in London or the metropolitan areas. However, they are seeking views on how arrangements for some services, such as grants to the voluntary sector and the arts, might be improved in these areas.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the full cost of calculating the Government's council tax figures and the cost of publishing the documentation outlining the Government's proposed system of local government finance.

Mr. Key: No additional expense was incurred in calculating the illustrative council tax figures, as these were compiled from data held by the Department on existing computer systems.

The estimated cost of publishing the documents outlining the Government's finance proposals was some £20,000.

Drinking Water Inspectorate

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many technical employees on the drinking water inspectorate were *(a)* previously employed by his Department and *(b)* previously employed by a water company, statutory water company or water authority or otherwise in the water industry.

Mr. Trippier: Seven members of the professional staff of the drinking water inspectorate were previously employed by my Department, and two by other Government Departments. Four joined the inspectorate from water companies and one from a public analyst. Another was employed by a firm of consultants. Two people are on secondment from the water research centre.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the total number of days that staff of the drinking water inspectorate have spent on water company premises;

(2) how many site inspections have been carried out by staff of the drinking water inspectorate;

(3) what is the total number of inspections carried out by drinking water inspectorate staff and the total number carried out by others; what is the proportion of drinking water inspections which are sub-contracted out to consultants; and what is the name of each firm of consultants employed by the drinking water inspectorate and the value of the contract awarded in each case;

(4) what is the average amount of notice given to a water company before an inspection takes place;

(5) if he will list each water company inspection that has been carried out so far in each water company; and if he will give the date of each visit and the conclusions of the inspection.

Mr. Trippier: Since the drinking water inspectorate was established on 2 January 1990, inspectorate staff have spent about 120 days on water company premises. These staff have inspected 15 of the 39 water companies in England and Wales. Two firms of consultants, Watson Hawksley Ltd, and Rofe, Kennard and Lapworth were engaged by the inspectorate to make 24 inspections. For commercial reasons it would not be appropriate to give the value of the contracts.

Inspections were made between June 1990 and February 1991 and, in general, water companies were given five weeks' notice. All inspections, except three, included site visits. The conclusions from the inspections will be summarised in the first annual report from the chief inspector of the drinking water inspectorate which is due to be published in July.

Cryptosporidia Outbreak, Hull

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take action against Yorkshire Water for the outbreak of cryptosporidia in Hull in 1990.

Mr. Trippier: The final report of the outbreak control team was delivered recently to the drinking water inspectorate which is investigating the incident. The inspectorate will make recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in due course upon any action to be taken.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Metropolitan police to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the deputy commissioner that payments by the Metropolitan police to management and computer consultants, in each financial year since 1984-85, estimated expenditure for 1990-91 and budget estimate for 1991-92 are as follows:

	£
1984-85	346,000
1985-86	433,000
1986-87	558,000
1987-88	702,000
1988-89	742,000
1989-90	939,000
[1]1990-91	1,538,000
[2]1991-92	911,000

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Budget estimate.

I understand that information on spending on management consultants only, and for the years prior to 1984-85, is not available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by the Metropolitan police on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The deputy commissioner has told me that expenditure on staff and accommodation costs of the directorate of public affairs, and on recruitment and other advertising and other promotional literature, in each financial year since 1985-86, estimated expenditure for 1990-91 and budget estimate for 1991-92 are as follows:

	£
1985-86	3,622,861
1986-87	4,444,103
1987-88	4,555,000
1988-89	5,475,000
1989-90	5,366,000
[1]1990-91	5,916,000
[2]1991-92	6,390,000

[1] Estimated Out-turn.
[2] Budget Estimate.

Information for the years prior to 1985-86 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Metropolitan police; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The deputy commissioner tells me that the complement and staff in post in the Metropolitan police statistics branch is shown in the table.

Year	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Grade													
Grade 7	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)
SEO	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	—(1)	—(—)
HEO	2 (2)	2 (2)	3 (3)	3 (3)	2 (2)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)
EO	9 (9)	9 (9)	9 (9)	8 (9)	8 (8)	8 (8)	8 (8)	8 (8)	9 (8)	8 (8)	7 (8)	9 (8)	9 (8)
AO	52(61)	62(61)	58 (61)	57 (61)	51(61)	59(61)	61(61)	61(61)	62(62)	58(62)	55(62)	59(62)	53(58)
AA	—(—)	1(—)	2 (—)	— (1)	— (1)	— (1)	— (1)	— (1)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)
Supporting grades	10 (9)	11 (9)	9 (10)	12 (9)	7(10)	5 (7)	5 (7)	7 (7)	7 (7)	7 (7)	7 (7)	8 (7)	6 (7)
Graphics grades	3 (3)	2 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)
Data processing grades	4(13)	4(13)	5 (13)	5 (13)	5 (5)	4 (5)	4 (5)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)	—(—)
Total	82(99)	93(99)	91(101)	90(101)	78(92)	84(90)	85(89)	83(84)	85(84)	78(82)	74(82)	80(82)	72(77)

Notes:
1. Complement figures are shown in brackets.
2. Only the Grade 7 post is filled by a statistician, the remaining posts being filled by executive, administrative and support grades staff, who undertake a mixture of statistical and support duties. An additional Grade 7 post is located in the Management Support Department.

Police Forces (Restructure)

93. **Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce primary legislation to restructure the police forces of England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans for primary legislation, but we are considering what further improvements in the service delivered by the police can be achieved by developments within the present constitutional framework.

Trevi Group

94. **Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish details of any representations the Government have made to the Trevi group regarding combating terrorism after 1992.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government continue to press in Trevi for the closest possible co-operation against terrorism, which we regard as an essential objective in its own right. We have also continued to make clear to our Community partners our intention to maintain necessary checks at United Kingdom ports and airports after 1992.

Kurdish Asylum-Seekers

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Kurdish asylum-seekers are required to report to police stations on a weekly basis; how many of them are aged *(a)* under 18 years and *(b)* under 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available centrally.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information available is as follows. Staff in post on 1 April in each of the relevant years in the statistical divisions of the Home Office are set out in the following table:

	Statisticians	*Other grades*	*Total*
1979-80	24	127·5	151·5
1980-81	25	127	152
1981-82	24	125	149
1982-83	23	123·5	146·5
1983-84	22	129	151
1984-85	25	128	153
1985-86	26	139·5	165·5
1986-87	24	140·5	164·5
1987-88	24·5	144·5	169
1988-89	27·5	140	167·5
1989-90	30	143	173
1990-91	28	158·5	186·5
1991-92	31·5	168·5	200

The number of vacancies, if any, varies from week to week and no separate record is maintained.

Northumbria Police

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to how many hours' overtime were on average worked by a police constable in his force *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable of Northumbria that the average amount of overtime worked per officer in the federated ranks in Northumbria in 1990 was 185·37 hours. Figures for 1979 are no longer available and the other detailed information requested would be obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to how many *(a)* constables, *(b)* inspectors, *(c)* chief inspectors, *(d)* superintendents and *(e)* chief superintendents there were in his force (i) in 1979 and (ii) in 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table.

At 31 December	*1979*	*1990*
Constables	2,529	2,680
Inspectors	190	193
Chief Inspectors	60	63
Superintendents	51	50
Chief Superintendents	13	13

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to the number of *(a)* police officers, *(b)* police cars and *(c)* motor cyclists who were on hand at Newcastle airport for the recent visit of the Duke and Duchess of Kent; and what was the cost of policing the Kents' visit to Northumbria.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The level of policing for particular events is a matter of operational judgment for the chief constable concerned. I understand from the chief constable of the Northumbria police that a total of 30 officers were on hand at Newcastle airport for the visit by their Royal Highnesses on 10 April. Of these, 12 were drivers, 14 were motor cyclists, and four officers were deployed from territorial divisional duties. The use of motor cyclists in particular resulted in significant reductions in the level of police resources needed during the visits subsequently made by their Royal Highnesses to seven different venues in the county of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. The additional cost to the Northumbria police was about £2,000.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to the total real cost of policing in Northumbria for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. This is a matter for the police authority.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to the number of officers *(a)* stationed and *(b)* residing at Ponteland; and what are their duties.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has no plans to call for a report; nor is the information centrally held.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to the number of serving officers for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of officers on the strength of the Northumbria police at 31 December for each year since 1979 is as follows:

	Police strength
1979	3,339
1980	3,340
1981	3,331
1982	3,329
1983	3,337
1984	3,344
1985	3,368
1986	3,361
1987	3,478
1988	3,460
1989	3,526
1990	3,528

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief

constable of Northumbria as to the total cost, including manpower, of the force helicopter for each year since it was acquired.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Northumbria police air support unit became operational in November 1989. I understand from the chief constable that the cost of the first year of operation was £656,320, including police manpower costs of £165,670.

Police Incomes

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the gross income of *(a)* a police constable, *(b)* a sergeant, *(c)* an inspector, *(d)* a chief inspector, *(e)* a superintendent and *(f)* a chief superintendent in a provincial force in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Minimum and maximum basic salaries for the years in question are as follows:

	June 1979		*September 1990*	
	Minimum	*Maximum*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Constable	3,600	5,700	10,866	18,132
Sergeant	5,450	6,250	17,346	20,896
Inspector	6,250	7,440	19,896	22,590
Chief Inspector	7,100	8,235	22,590	25,128
Superintendent	9,800	10,710	30,729	33,369
Chief Superintendent	10,800	11,775	34,167	36,276

All other entitlements depend on the individual circumstances of the officer in question and are set out in the Police Regulations 1987, copies of which are available in the Library.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Financial Assistance

32. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how much financial help the Church Commissioners have provided to churches, abbeys and cathedrals in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' primary responsibility is the support of the clergy and their funds are not generally available for churches. However, they provided approximately £900,000 in 1987, £1·8 million in 1988 and £2·5 million in 1989 towards church buildings, either under specific legislative authority or to meet legal obligations to do with land ownership.

Canterbury Cathedral

33. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how much was spent by the Church Commissioners in payment to the staff of Canterbury cathedral in 1990-91.

Mr. Alison: A total of £54,650.

Church Residential Property

34. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what account the commissioners take of the housing shortage in London in respect of their policies on management of their residential property holdings.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' prime responsibility in the management of all their assets, including residential property, is to provide support for the clergy of the Church of England. Within this overall policy, the commissioners' Octavia Hill estates help meet a social need by providing rented accommodation for over 1,500 families on lower incomes who would otherwise look to local authorities for their housing.

Commissioners' Assets

35. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the value of the current assets of the Church Commissioners.

Mr. Alison: The latest published figure, at 31 December 1989, was £3·1 billion.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Employees

44. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many people are currently employed in the Palace of Westminster; how many were employed five, 10 and 15 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The House of Commons Commission employs 1,032 staff. A further 1,100 are employed by Members. In addition 7,976 photo identity pass holders are currently entitled to access to the House. These include police and security staff, Department of the Environment personnel, Government Department officials, and others.

Comparative figures for five, 10 and 15 years ago in respect of House of Commons staff are 964, 879 and 550 respectively. Meaningful figures for the other categories of pass holders for those years are not readily available.

Televising of House

45. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on televising the House on cable systems.

Mr. MacGregor: In its recent report, the Select Committee on Broadcasting reiterated its belief in the desirability of establishing a television channel dedicated to continuous coverage of parliamentary proceedings. Of the three proposals submitted to it, the Committee concluded that the scheme put forward by United Artists was "the most thoroughly worked out and immediately practicable". The United Artists service, which is expected to begin in the autumn, will be available, without any extra charge to subscribers, to any home or other building served by a local cable network. In addition, it is hoped, subject to the outcome of discussions involving the Independent Television Commission, that the service might also be transmitted via one of the spare transponders on the Marco Polo satellite, for the time being at least by BSkyB.

Kuwait (Oil fires)

46. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee to consider Her Majesty's Government's aid to British contractors involved in trying to extinguish Kuwait oil fires.

Mr. MacGregor: No.

European Community (Communications)

47. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will make a further statement about the introduction of free telephone calls to European institutions.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

Palace of Westminster (Restoration)

48. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects that part of the Ibbs report which will bring responsibility for the restoration of the Palace of Westminster within his responsibilities to be implemented.

Mr. MacGregor: The report on House of Commons services, by the team led by Sir Robin Ibbs, recommended among other things that responsibility for the parliamentary works budget should pass from the Secretary of State for the Environment to the House of Commons Commission. The House of Lords has subsequently agreed to accept responsibility for its share of the cost of the services provided under this budget, which include routine maintenance and refurbishment, and the provision of new buildings, as well as the restoration of the fabric of the Palace of Westminster. The Ibbs report envisaged that the transfer of responsibility for these services might take place as early as the beginning of the 1992-93 financial year, subject to the introduction of other organisational changes in the House of Commons service. It is too early to say whether that target will be achieved. There are no proposals to transfer responsibility for these matters to the Leader of the House.

Parliamentary Procedures

49. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he is now able to announce the plans for changes in procedures for the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to a similar question from the hon. Member on 25 March at column 607.

Telephone Services

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any plans to improve the telephone services in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor: It is planned to upgrade the software in the Palace of Westminster telephone exchange within the next 12 months. This will enable the automatic routing of outgoing calls by the cheapest means. During the same period it is hoped to modernise the equipment in use in the Members' Message Bureau in order to provide a more efficient message-taking service for Members and the general public.

Resettlement Grants

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the TSRB report on resettlement grants will be published.

Mr. MacGregor: During Second Reading of the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Bill on 31 January I announced the Government's intention to invite the TSRB to review resettlement grants. Copies of the report have today been placed in the Library of the House and are available from the Vote Office. It will be published as an appendix to the TSRB's report on parliamentary pensions.

Subject to the views of the House, the Government are minded to accept the TSRB's recommendation that resettlement grants should be extended to all Members aged 65 and over on a tapered basis according to length of service and age. This will require a resolution of the House, and I intend to bring this forward at an early opportunity.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Parliamentary Procedures

38. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what plans the Commission has to undertake a fundamental review to improve the way Parliament operates and to ensure that value for money is obtained.

Mr. Beith: The Ibbs report on House of Commons services was published on 28 November and was given a generally positive welcome by the House in the debate on 17 January. Steps to implement the report are now in train. The whole thrust of the Ibbs report was in the direction of better accountability and value for money in the delivery of services for the House. A further review was not seen to be required.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Family Conciliation Services

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the public funding of family conciliation services.

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on 18 April 1991 at column *221*.

Rape

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration the DPP gives to the need for corroborative evidence when deciding whether to proceed with prosecutions for alleged rape; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Corroborative evidence is not demanded as a matter of law for a charge of rape to be capable of being proved. The CPS assesses the available evidence in accordance with the criteria contained in the code for Crown prosecutors, bearing in mind the legal

requirement that a judge shall warn a jury that it is dangerous to convict of rape without some corroboration. Only if the Crown prosecutor considers that there is a realistic prospect of a conviction, and that a prosecution is required in the public interest, will the case proceed to court.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Lord Chancellor's Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year: and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: On the information available, the cost to the Lord Chancellor's Department of employing management consultants for each financial year from 1984-85 to date is as follows.

	£
1984-85	Nil
1985-86	221,000
1986-87	473,837
1987-88	134,255
1988-89	205,882
1989-90	178,500
1990-91	147,000
1991-92	[1]192,000

[1] Forecast.

The figures exclude computer consultancy. Figures for 1979-80 and 1983-84 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give, for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Lord Chancellor's Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

The Attorney-General: The information that is readily available on the number of staff and complement by grade in the statistics branch of the Lord Chancellor's Department is shown in the tables:

Grade of staff	*In post January 1980*	*Complement*
Grade 7/statistician	1	n/a
Assistant/senior assistant statistician	1	n/a
Senior executive officer	1	n/a
Higher executive officer	1	n/a
Executive officer	3	n/a
Clerical officer	6	n/a
Clerical assistant	1	n/a

Grade of staff	*In post July 1984*	*Complement*
Grade 7/statistician	1	n/a
Assistant/senior assistant statistician	1	n/a
Higher executive officer	1	n/a
Executive officer	3	n/a
Clerical officer	6	n/a
Clerical assistant	1	n/a

Grade of staff	*In post July 1988*	*Complement*
Grade 7/statistician	1	n/a
Assistant/senior assistant statistician	1	n/a
Higher executive officer	1	n/a
Executive officer	3	n/a
Administrative officer	4	n/a
Administrative assistant	2	n/a

Grade of Staff	*In post March 1989*	*Complement 1988-89*
Grade 7/Statistician	1	1
Assistant/Senior Assistant Statistician	1	1
Higher Executive Officer	1	1
Executive Officer	2	3
Administrative Officer	4	4
Administrative Assistant	2	2

Grade of Staff	*In post March 1990*	*Complement 1989-90*
Grade 7/Statistician	1	1
Assistant/Senior Assistant Statistician	1	1
Higher Executive Officer	1	1
Executive Officer	2	2
Administrative Officer	4	4
Administrative Assistant	3	3

Grade of Staff	*In post April 1991*	*Complement 1991-92*
Grade 7/Statistician	1	[1]
Assistant/Senior Assistant Statistician	1	[1]
Higher Executive Officer	1	[1]
Executive Officer	3	[1]
Administrative Officer	4	[1]
Administrative Assistant	2	[1]

[1] No longer applicable.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total expenditure by the Lord Chancellor's Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

The Attorney General: Total expenditure on press and public relations excluding staff costs is as follows:

	£
1984-85	5,180
1985-86	13,253
1986-87	23,282
1987-88	34,500
1988-89	34,159
1989-90	33,616
1990-91	29,113

The amounts spent for previous years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The budget for 1991-92 is £73,000.

Conveyancers

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Attorney-General when the Lord Chancellor intends to publish for consultation his proposals for regulations on the competence and conduct

of authorised practitioners, the new class of conveyancer, to be made under section 40 of the Courts and Legal Service Act 1990.

The Attorney-General: My noble and learned friend the Lord Chancellor is issuing these today. Copies of the draft regulations and explanatory consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Foreign Debts

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the estimates of outstanding debt for *(a)* Sudan, *(b)* Zimbabwe, *(c)* Ghana, *(d)* Zambia and *(e)* Uganda.

Mrs. Chalker: According to the World bank debt tables 1990-91, the total external debts outstanding for the five countries listed are as follows:

	Total external Debt (US$ millions)
Sudan	12,965
Zimbabwe	3,088
Ghana	3,087
Zambia	6,874
Uganda	1,808

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what concessions have been given to *(a)* Sudan, *(b)* Zimbabwe, *(c)* Ghana, *(d)* Zambia and *(e)* Uganda in respect of repayment of debt to bankers and the Government during the last three years.

Mrs. Chalker: For Ghana, Sudan and Uganda during the last three years Her Majesty's Government have cancelled old aid loans worth £10·4 million, £1·3 million and £1·3 million respectively, under their scheme for retrospective terms adjustment. Zimbabwe and Ghana have strong records of servicing their debts and have avoided the need for rescheduling. Uganda and Zambia have received concessional reschedulings of their official debts to Government creditors under Toronto terms during the last three years: Uganda in January 1989 and Zambia in July 1990. Sudan has been unable to reach agreement with her creditors and has allowed substantial debt arrears to accumulate. None of the countries listed has reached debt relief agreements with its commercial bank creditors during the last three years.

Iraqi Refugees

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate the Government have made of *(a)* the aid requirements of the Iraqi refugees over the next six months and *(b)* the United Kingdom's contribution to this; and from which budget the United Kingdom's funds will come.

Mrs. Chalker: No such estimates have been made. The appeals launched by the international agencies alone total over US$620 million. So far, the United Kingdom has made available £21 million for refugee assistance, as well as the aid share of the costs of the airbridge and Operation Haven. These costs are being met from the overseas aid programme.

Peru

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being given to Peru to contain cholera.

Mrs. Chalker: In response to a request from the Peruvian Government, the Overseas Development Administration made an immediate cash contribution in February of US$20,000 through the Pan American Health Organisation, which is co-ordinating the relief effort. In March we contributed a further £100,000 through PAHO in response to the rapidly increasing scale of the epidemic. In addition, we are providing some £180,000 as Britain's share of the European Community's emergency aid.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of United Kingdom flights of relief supplies for Iraqi refugees to *(a)* Turkey and *(b)* Iran to date.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave on 25 April to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). As of 26 April, the Overseas Development Administration has sent seven flights of relief supplies to Iran and 20 to Turkey. More will follow.

Chile

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was, for each year since 1970, the amount of funds given to Chile by Her Majesty's Government under bilateral technical co-operation agreements in 1991 money.

Mrs. Chalker: Gross bilateral technical co-operation expenditure for Chile from 1970 to 1989, the latest year for which figures are available, was:

Year	*Current prices*	*Constant (1990) prices*
1970	233	1,604
1971	232	1,460
1972	324	1,886
1973	507	2,756
1974	382	1,807
1975	306	1,138
1976	939	3,032
1977	2,073	5,876
1978	1,079	2,747
1979	2,131	4,742
1980	2,021	3,764
1981	1,452	2,427
1982	675	1,049
1983	442	653
1984	257	363
1985	256	342
1986	202	260
1987	236	2.0
1988	241	2.7
1989	267	287

The figures in the first column include amounts, totalling over £11 million in current prices, spent since 1973 in support of various World University Service programmes for Chilean refugee students.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider increasing the level of aid and trade provision for the current 12 months.

Mrs. Chalker: No. Additional resources are not available within the aid programme for this purpose.

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the actual level of aid and trade provision for each of the past five years and the official forecast for the next two years in monetary terms and as a percentage of total aid.

Mrs. Chalker: As a percentage of the overseas aid budget, expenditure on aid and trade provision over the last five financial years was:

£ million

	Aid and trade provision expenditure	*Expenditure as a percentage of aid budget*
1986-87	81	6·3
1987-88	48	3·7
1988-89	59	4·0
1989-90	62	3·9
1990-91	[1]94	[1]5·8

[1] Provisional.

The aid and trade provision budget for 1991-92 is £97 million out of a total overseas aid budget of £1,720 million. The budget for 1992-93 will be set following the outcome of the annual public expenditure survey.

PRIME MINISTER

St. John Ambulance Brigade

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make facilities available to staff in his office to contribute to the appeal that has been launched for people with the name of John to help raise £5 million for the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

The Prime Minister: Arrangements exist for officials to contribute by deduction from pay to charities of their choice. The decision by members of my office about which charitable appeals to support must be a matter for them.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he, with his colleagues responsible for transport in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, will consider consultations on ways to let the public know whether a driver killed in a road crash had consumed alcohol.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply he received from my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd) on 22 April 1991 at columns 350-51.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Prime Minister's office to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

The Prime Minister: There has been no expenditure by my office on fees to management consultants since 1979-80, and none is planned for 1991-92.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Cabinet Office to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

The Prime Minister: The expenditure by the Cabinet Office, including from its creation on 1 October 1987, the Office of the Minister of the Civil Service, on management and computer consultancies, including certain consultancies relating to the civil service as a whole, in the financial years from 1983-84 is as follows:

Year	*£*
1983-84	152,000
1984-85	423,818
1985-86	329,334
1986-87	505,092
1987-88	417,778

The figures for each year since then, which exclude the cost of computer consultants, are as follows:

Year	*£*
1988-89	70,608
1989-90	51,500
1990-91	[1]182,000
1991-92	[2]242,735

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Note:
The figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 reflect increases in management consultancies undertaken by the Cabinet Office for the civil service generally.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total expenditure by the Cabinet Office on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

The Prime Minister: Expenditure on press and public relations by the Cabinet Office was:

	£
1984-85	247,495
1985-86	232,980
1986-87	224,813
1987-88	215,925
1988-89	201,837
1989-90	205,650

The latest estimate for 1990-91 is £165,088 and the budget for 1991-92 is £213,323.

Similar information is not available for the years prior to 1984-85.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total expenditure by the Prime Minister's office on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

The Prime Minister: Expenditure by my office on press and public relations was not recorded separately before 1987-88. The total expenditure for each year since then and the budget for 1991-92 are as follows:

	£
1987-88	377,987
1988-89	419,326
1989-90	427,802
1990-91	[1]553,010
1991-92	[2]554,748

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.
Note: The figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 include notional superannuation costs which are excluded from the figures for earlier years.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Cabinet Office; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

The Prime Minister: The number of staff, by grade, employed on 1 April in each of the years from 1982 in the statistical divisions of the Cabinet Office, differentiated between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts, were:

Grade	*Staff in post, with in brackets, where different, total complement* *Members of Statistician Group*	*Members of Administration and other groups*[1]	*Total*
1982	51·0	153·0	204·0 (209·0)
1983	50·0	159·5	209·5 (208·5)
1984	47·0	146·0	193·0 (193·0)
1985	50·5	136·5	187·0 (186·0)
1986	52·0	148·5	200·5 (198·5)
1987			
1a	1	—	1
3	3	—	3
5	9	1	10 (9)
7	24	6	30 (31)
Senior Executive Officer	—	8	8 (7)
Higher Executive Officer	—	23	23 (22·5)
Executive Officer	—	34	34 (35·5)
Administrative Officer	—	24	24
Personal Secretary	—	13	13 (12·5)
Senior Assistant and Assistant Statistician	9	—	9 (11)
Cadet Statistician	7	—	7
Chief Draughtsman	—	1	1
Senior Draughtsman	—	1	1
Higher Draughtsman	—	2	2
Draughtsman	—	6	6 (7)
Information Officer	—	1	1
	53	120	173 (175·5)
1988			
1A	1	—	1
3	3	—	3
5	9	1	10 (9)
7	25	4	29 (31)
Senior Executive Officer	—	8	8
Higher Executive Officer	—	20	20 (21)
Executive Officer	—	31	31 (37)
Administrative Officer	—	21	21 (24)
Senior Personal Secretary	—	1	1
Personal Secretary	—	11	11 (11·5)
Senior Assistant and Assistant Statistician	9	—	9 (10)
Cadet Statistician	6	—	6 (7)
Chief Draughtsman	—	1	1
Senior Draughtsman	—	1	1
Higher Draughtsman	—	2	2
Draughtsman	—	5	5 (7)
Information Officer	—	1	1
	53	107	160 (175·5)
1989			
1A	1	—	1
3	3	—	3
5	9	1	10 (9)
7	25	4	29 (31·5)
Senior Executive Officer	—	7	7 (5·5)
Higher Executive Officer	—	18	18 (21)
Executive Officer	—	35	35 (36)
Administrative Officer	—	25	25 (24·5)
Senior Personal Secretary	—	2	2
Personal Secretary	—	11	11 (10·5)
Senior Assistant and Assistant Statistician	8	—	8 (11)
Cadet Statistician	3	—	3 (1·5)
Chief Draughtsman	—	1	1
Senior Draughtsman	—	1	1
Higher Draughtsman	—	2	2 (1)
Draughtsman	—	4	4 (7)
Information Officer	—	1	1
	49	112	161 (167·5)

[1] Includes all other non statistician group staff.

Figures for the years prior to 1982 are no longer available, and information on the numbers of staff by grade is not readily available for the years 1982 to 1986 and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Since July 1989, when the Central Statistical Office became a separate department, the Cabinet Office has had no statistical divisions.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in

the statistical divisions in the Prime Minister's office; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

The Prime Minister: During the period in question, there has been no statistical division within my office. There are no statisticians in post or on the staff complement, and there are no plans to create any such posts.

Iraqi Refugees

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has any plans to increase the financial year 1991-92 budget of the Overseas Development Administration to cover the costs of emergency relief for Iraqi refugees.

The Prime Minister: Additions to the overseas aid programme totalling up to £30 million have been agreed to fund the Government's further efforts to relieve the suffering of Iraqi refugees.

Within this total, up to £20 million will be provided to continue the airbridge operation, to provide urgently needed supplies, and to finance the immediately foreseeable costs falling to the aid budget of the United Kingdom's participation in Operation Haven inside Iraq. The balance of £10 million represents the Government's contribution to the Kurdish refugee appeal announced on Thursday 25 April.

These additions will enable the ODA to maintain its planned development activities, and to continue to provide substantial humanitarian assistance to help relieve famine in Africa.

North Sea

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set up a high-level task force combining all the Departments of state concerned, all industries involved and all interested parties to bring forward proposals to secure continued viability of all uses and the well-being of the North sea, once gas and oil structures are decommissioned; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Departments maintain regular contact with a wide range of organisations with an interest in many aspects of the North sea. I see no advantage in establishing an additional forum.

Consideration of an abandonment programme by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy under the provisions of the Petroleum Act 1987 will take account of consultations with organisations concerned with other uses of the sea including fishing, and with environmental interests. The abandonment of offshore installations will be performed in such a way as to cause no significant adverse effects upon navigation or the marine environment, in accordance with our international obligations.

Opposition Parties (Access to Civil Service)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will consider allowing opposition parties equal access to civil servants and publicity budgets to enable them to prepare and publicise their own policies.

The Prime Minister: No. By long-standing convention, civil service time and Government publicity budgets are not used for party political purposes.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the civil service trade unions regarding the effectiveness of the rules set out in the Armstrong memorandum of December 1987 on the propriety of publishing party political material using civil servants' time.

The Prime Minister: None.

Arms Trade

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has for an international register of arms sales.

The Prime Minister: At the special European Council in Luxembourg on 8 April, I proposed a register of arms sales at the United Nations to monitor the scale of arms build-up in any one country. We are taking every opportunity to urge others to support the idea of such a register. Our ambassador at the United Nations is also taking this forward in New York.

First Division Association

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister how many of the demands of the First Division Association code of civil service ethics have been incorporated into official regulations.

The Prime Minister: The Government's position is set out in the note by the former head of the home civil service on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers, issued in December 1987, subject to the further points contained in the Government's responses to the fifth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee for the 1989-90 Session.

Iraqi Arms Disposal

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has put to the United Nations for a commission to monitor Iraqi arms disposal.

The Prime Minister: United Nations Security Council resolution 687 requires the Secretary-General to establish a special commission to oversee the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. We hope that the special commission will start work as soon as possible, and we shall co-operate with it fully.

Members' Letters

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, columns *293-94*, to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), whether he will make it his aim to provide responses to Members' letters to Ministers which are as full and as helpful as possible, on a time scale similar to that for a response to a parliamentary question.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) on 12 February at column *393*. I have nothing further to add.

South Africa

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister whether he raised with Mr. de Klerk at their meeting on 22 April the failure of the South African Government to release all political prisoners by the target date of 28 February 1991, as agreed in the Pretoria minute of 6 August 1990.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* No, not least because the target date of 30 April has not yet been reached.

DEFENCE

US Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the recently published report "US Nuclear Weapons: Safety Implications for the United Kingdom," released by the British American Security Information Council.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes.

The Gulf

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much and what equipment that returned from the Gulf has subsequently been sent back to the region.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following major equipments are undertaking Operation Haven tasks; three Hercules C-130 aircraft and 12 Chinook helicopters. Eight of the Chinook helicopters were transferred direct from Operation Granby tasks.

Submarines (Z-berths)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his intention to proceed with plans to establish Z-berths for submarines at Swansea.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Kurdish Refugees

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of a flight of *(a)* Hercules aircraft and *(b)* Chinook helicopters involved in the operation to relieve Kurds on the borders of Iraq; what is the cost of other relief work undertaken by United Kingdom forces; and what proportion of costs incurred by the armed forces in the operation to relieve Iraqi Kurds will fall on the Overseas Development Administration budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is too early to give an estimate of the cost of MOD assistance to the Overseas Development Administration in support of its programme of humanitarian relief to the Kurds. The charges to the ODA will cover mainly the deployment of aircraft, goods supplied and in-theatre flying for the air drop, as well as the cost of building and supplying camps. Charges to the ODA for aircraft used in the relief operation will be based on an estimated average cost per flying hour of £2,020 for a Hercules and £2,445 for a Chinook.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Alan Clark: I regret that not all the information requested is available. However, the staff complements by grade, and the associated number of vacancies, in Ministry of Defence statistical divisions for the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 are as follows:

Grade/Year	*1 April 1989*		*1 April 1990*		*1 April 1991*	
	Complement	*Vacancies*	*Complement*	*Vacancies*	*Complement*	*Vacancies*
Grade 4[1]	1	0	1	0	1	0
Grade 5[1]	2	0	2	0	2	0
Grade 6[1]	1	0	1	0	1	0
Grade 7[1]	25	4	25	3	21	1
SEO	1	0	2	0	0	0
HEO—Admin	16	2	14	0	15	0
HEO—ADP	6	0	6	0	6	0
HSO	1	0	1	0	1	0
AS/SAS[1]	10	1	8	3	7	1
EO—Admin	35	3	30	1	26	2
EO—ADP	17	1	17	1	17	1
AO	56	9	40·5	5	37	4·5
AA	18	6	9	0·5	7·5	2
PS	3	0	3	0	3	0
Reprographic Op	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	193	26	159·5	13·5	144·5	11·5

[1]Professional statisticians.

Chieftain Tank

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the suitability of French-manufactured tanks as a replacement for Chieftain tanks.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department is making a full assessment of the suitability of the French Leclerc tank equipment for our future main battle tank fleet.

Armed Forces Personnel

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the latest figures for home ownership for married personnel in the armed forces by service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest survey which included information on home ownership of personnel in the armed forces was conducted in 1987-88. The following figures show the level of home ownership of personnel who were married, widowed, divorced or separated (figures for married personnel only are not available):

Armed Forces	Percentage
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	75
Army	26
Royal Air Force	49

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will supply hon. Members with the latest Army personnel research establishment reports on *(a)* any continuous attitude survey for both officers and soldiers, *(b)* any premature voluntary release survey relating to officers and soldiers and *(c)* the proposed report on housing attitudes when it is ready.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the gratuity-terminal grant for *(a)* a sergeant with 22 years' service and *(b)* a major aged 50 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A sergeant with 22 years reckonable service would receive a tax-free terminal grant of £16,050; a major aged 50 (assuming 29 years reckonable service from age 21) would receive £37,932.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the figures for premature voluntary release from the armed forces for the last two years by quarter.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1989	
January to March	2,693
April to June	3,010
July to September	3,014
October to December	2,685
1990	
January to March	2,567
April to June	2,794
July to September	2,942
October to December	2,350

The figures include both officers and other ranks.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Michael Ashcroft

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any form of diplomatic status has been *(a)* sought and *(b)* conferred on Michael Ashcroft, chairman of ADT, to cover his present stay in the United Kingdom in respect of his duties as roving trade ambassador for Belize.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No.

Sri Lanka

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any representations from Amnesty International on disappearances, deaths in custody, torture and judicial killings in Sri Lanka since 1983; and if he will review Britain's aid to Sri Lanka with regard to the promotion of peace, political settlement and human rights.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are in regular contact with Amnesty International about Sri Lanka, and have frequently raised our concerns about human rights issues with the Sri Lankan Government. Both bilaterally and with our European partners, we have make it clear that future decisions on development aid will be affected by the Government's performance on human rights.

Albatrosses

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the actions of his Environment, Science and Energy Department in preventing mortality of albatrosses through long fishing lines.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: At the general assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, in Perth, Australia, last December an official from the Department discussed with his Australian counterparts the problem of the incidental mortality of albatrosses through long-line fishing, about which we share the hon. Member's concern. Since then, the Department has kept in touch with Mr. Nigel Brothers of the Tasmanian Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage, who is conducting excellent research into this problem. We will continue to keep the hon. Member informed of developments.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Staff in statistical and administrative posts are employed in the Overseas Development Administration but not in the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Figures are available only for the period 1984-85 to 1991-92, as follows:

	1984-85		1985-86		1986-87		1987-88		1988-89		1989-90		1990-91		1991-92	
	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual
Statistical Posts																
Chief Statistician (G5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Statistician (G6)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Statisticians (G7)	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5
Assistant/Senior Assistants	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Administrative Posts																
HEO	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EO	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2

	1984-85		1985-86		1986-87		1987-88		1988-89		1989-90		1990-91		1991-92	
	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual	Complement	Actual
AO	7	5	6	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5
PS	1	1	0·5	0·5	0·5	0·5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	21	18	18·5	16·5	15·5	16·5	17	16	16	17	17	18	17	19	17	17

Peru

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice is being given to British travellers about travel to areas of Peru at risk from cholera.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We advise travellers that there is a risk from cholera in the coastal and interior regions of Peru, particularly in the poorer townships where hygiene and sanitation standards are inadequate. Travellers should avoid food vendors and cheap restaurants, observe strict personal hygiene, ensure they are vaccinated against the disease and carry a valid vaccination certificate.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives in regard to fiscal and trade incentives to assist in protecting the environment were discussed in the meeting between the EC Foreign Affairs Ministers and the Foreign Ministers from Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador and Mexico in Luxembourg on 25 April.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Ministers of the Community and the Rio group, meeting in Luxembourg on 26 and 27 April, discussed extending co-operation in a wide range of areas including trade, investment and the environment, in the context of the institutional framework established between the European Community and the Rio group. I will place a copy of the meeting's communiqué in the Library.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he raised the issue of Brazil and Argentina signing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty during his meetings with his respective Brazilian and Argentine counterparts in Luxembourg on 25 April.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, attended the EC-Rio group meeting in Luxembourg on 26-28 April. At the meeting, Ministers noted with interest the initiative by Argentina and Brazil to set up a joint system of accounting and verification, applicable to all nuclear installations in both countries, and to negotiate an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. A copy of the communiqué will be placed in the Library of the House.

Iraq

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will propose to the United Nations Security Council a resolution relating to the discussions which have taken place between the Kurdish leadership and the Iraqi Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Any agreement between the Kurdish groups and the Iraqi Government is an internal Iraqi matter, but, if requested to do so, the international community will wish to consider what further reassurance it can give to the Kurdish peoples. The United Nations has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Iraqi Government on the conduct of relief operations in Iraq based on the personal safety of the refugees and the normalisation of their lives in their places of origin.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by Her Majesty's Government to provide substantial humanitarian aid to Shias in southern Iraq; if he will make it his policy that British and other coalition forces should remain on the southern Iraq-Kuwait border until an orderly replacement by United Nation's peace-keeping forces has taken place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 25 April to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), at column *521-22.*

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the Iraqi authorities offering rewards for Kurdish men and women handed over to Iraqi Ba'athist forces, including police; what estimates he has received about how many such people have been handed over as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Although we regularly receive information from a number of sources about conditions in the Kurdish areas in Iraq, we have seen no reports of the activities described by the hon. Member.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration is being given to the establishment of safe havens on the Iraq-Iran border; what assessment has been made of the numbers of Kurds and others inside Iraq and inside Iran in need of humanitarian aid; how many air strips are being built on the Iran-Iraq border; what accessibility Hariri airport offers to humanitarian aid flights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Safe havens will be established where they are needed. The most recent estimates we have of the number of refugees is almost 1 million on the Iranian side of the border and nearly half a million on the Iraqi side of the border. Our first priority has been to provide immediate humanitarian assistance using the existing infrastructure. Where necessary, helicopters are being used to fly supplies to inaccessible areas. We and non-Government agencies are considering the use of all facilities in the area for extending relief operations.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations are being made to Iraq to ensure no Iraqi forces, including all categories of Iraqi police, are permitted to occupy areas in close proximity to safe havens and other areas occupied by Kurds and Shias; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Representations have been made to local Iraqi commanders and to Iraq's permanent

representative at the United Nations. Following these representations most of the armed Iraqis have now left the area where the safe camp is being established.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

Complement of staff and staff in post in MAFF statistical divisions

	Complement				*Staff in post*			
	grade 5	*grade 7*	*senior assistant/ assistant statistician*	*support staff*	*grade 5*	*grade 7*	*senior assistant/ assistant statistician*	*support staff*
1979-80	2	8	8	201	2	8	8	198·5
1980-81	2	8	7	186	2	9	7	176
1981-82	2	8	5	158	2	9	6	158
1982-83	2	8	5	156	2	8	5	151
1983-84	2	8	5	152	2	9	4	138
1985-85	2	8	4	150	2	8	4	131
1985-86	2	8	5	149	2	9	7	121
1986-87	2	8	5	123	2	8	8	117
1987-88	2	10	7	124	2	10	9	119
1988-89	2	10	9	132	2	10	9	114·5
1989-90	2	11	10	136·5	2	10	10	127·5
1990-91	2	11	10	134·5	2	11	8	130·5
1991-92	2	11	10	135·5	2	11	8	128·5

Sugar

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evaluation he has made of the impact of the 1991-92 agriculture price proposals concerning sugar prices on export revenues of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Mr. Curry: The Commission's 1991-92 price proposals include a 5 per cent. cut in EC sugar prices. Any cut agreed would lead to a reduction in the value of the EC's export refunds for sugar. In turn, this should improve the world market, to the benefit of those ACP (and other) countries which sell sugar on it. The price to be offered to the ACP for sugar sent to the EC in 1991-92 under the Lomé sugar protocol—currently over twice the world market price—must be linked to EC prices, but is not negotiated with the ACP until after the price fixing.

HEALTH

Sight Tests

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to launch an information campaign about the availability of free sight tests;

(2) what steps his Department has taken to promote eye care in Britain.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Between 35 and 40 per cent. of the population are still entitled to free NHS sight tests. This includes all children and people who are entitled on either medical or low income grounds. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and I launched a publicity campaign this February to draw attention to those groups entitled to free NHS sight tests. There are also local publicity initiatives, such as the eye care week organised by Derbyshire family health services authority which took place between 15 and 20 April.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to review the policy of charges for national health service sight tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is Government policy that those who are able to pay for sight tests should do so, provided that vulnerable groups are protected. In June 1990 we published a report by an independent market research company—NOP—of the number of adults who had had sight tests during the first quarter of 1990. The results indicated that demand for sight tests was returning to normal after an initial drop when entitlement to NHS sight tests was restricted in April 1989. We will be monitoring sight test uptake by questions in the general household survey.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current fee paid to an ophthalmic optician for carrying out a national health service sight test.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The fee paid to an ophthalmic optician for carrying out a national health service sight test is £12·15 from 1 April 1991.

Hearing Aid Services

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *156*, on pilot projects to reduce waiting times for hearing aid services, if he will outline the different ways of reducing waiting times which are being tested by the projects, the length of time for which the projects will run and the parameters on which the projects are to be evaluated.

Mr. Dorrell: Information about the precise arrangements within each individual project is not held centrally. Detailed information about the design of the projects and the parameters for the evaluation is set out in "Provisions of Hearing Aid Services Under the NHS", a consultation paper issued by the Department in April 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library. A copy of a recently published paper "Hearing Aid Services: Evaluation of Pilot Projects (RDD 198/0765)" about the evaluation is also available in the Library. The Department is funding the projects for 12 months.

Evening Primrose Oil

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the occasions when the advisory committee on borderline substances has considered the efficiency of evening primrose oil over the last five years; when it next intends to consider it; and what applications he has received asking that it be permitted to be prescribed at national health service expense;

(2) how much public money has been spent on assessing the value of evening primrose oil with a view to allowing it to be prescribed at national health service expense.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The advisory committee on borderline substances considered evening primrose oil products in November 1986, September 1987, May 1990, November 1990 and March 1991, and will do so again when it considers appropriate. Over the past year, the Department has received 16 letters on this subject. The Department has not funded research into the efficacy of evening primrose oil.

Disabled People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the estimated number of people with *(a)* mental handicap, *(b)* mental illness, *(c)* physical disability and *(d)* sensory impairment who would need an authorised representative under the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986;

(2) what is the estimated number of authorised representatives necessary to implement sections 1 and 2 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986;

(3) what figure for the number of disabled people was used to estimate the cost of £18 million to implement sections 1 and 2 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986;

(4) what is the estimated cost for one authorised representative over one year acting under the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Dorrell: The local authority associations' estimates of the potential costs of sections 1 and 2 of the Act are based on detailed work undertaken independently by two contrasting local authorities. The estimates assume that authorised representatives might have been appointed for approximately 144,000 disabled people annually, on a one-to-one basis. Around a quarter of this number would be people with a mental handicap, with the remainder largely attributable to those suffering from mental illness, including dementia; a minimal proportion of the total would be people with physical disability or sensory impairment only. The estimates of the costs of an authorised representative for one year range from around £40 for administration, to about £215 if expenses and fees were also to be payable.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the costs of carrying out procedures under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 to give representation to disabled people.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The involvement of disabled people and those who care for them in decisions about the services they need is central to the Government's policy for

community care. However, it is not possible to say how many procedures under the National Health Service and Community Care Act, for example in relation to complaints and assessment, will involve individual disabled people being represented, and it is therefore not possible to estimate the costs arising.

Air Pollution

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published since 1979 on the subject of air pollution and human health; which studies were specifically concerned with (i) children and (ii) the elderly; which were undertaken on *(x)* a national, *(y)* a regional and *(z)* a local basis; which studies related specifically to (1) vehicle emissions and (2) tropospheric ozone; and what research is currently being undertaken into these areas.

Mr. Dorrell: Research on biomedical aspects of the effects of air pollution on health lies within the remit of the Medical Research Council

The Department continues to support the social medicine and health services research unit at St. Thomas's hospital in its long-term national study of health and growth among children, in which air pollution has featured as one factor.

Further support has been given to the St. Thomas's unit during this period for regional and local studies on indoor air pollution in relation to respiratory illnesses among children. Reports of all these studies are published in the scientific literature.

The small area health statistics unit at the London school of hygiene and tropical medicine, which is jointly funded by this and other Government Departments, is investigating mortality and cancer rates in communities which may be exposed to air pollution from industrial installations.

In 1990, the Department established an independent expert advisory group to assess, on the basis of national and international research data, the impact of air pollution episodes on health. The group's advice will relate to effects on the general public, although special attention will be given to sensitive groups such as the elderly and children. The group is currently completing its assessment of the effects of tropospheric ozone, and will next consider sulphur dioxide and related pollutants. Its reports will be published.

Canada (NHS Arrangements)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will seek reciprocal national health service arrangements for patients with the Government of Canada.

Mr. Dorrell: Talks with the Canadian authorities in 1982 indicated that a reciprocal agreement was unlikely to be concluded because of the legislative difficulties which it would cause the Canadian Government. We see no scope for reopening the matter at present.

Medicine Imports

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis is being made in the knowledge of or by his Department into the quality and chemical composition of batches of medicines imported from *(a)* eastern Europe, *(b)* Greece and *(c)* Belgium; and what study is being considered of the effects of medicines imported from eastern Europe into the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Medicines Control Agency, which is part of the Department of Health, operates a medicines testing scheme which analytically monitors the quality and chemical composition of a statistically significant sample of medicinal products marketed in the United Kingdom.

The medicines testing scheme includes imported medicines from Belgium, Greece and eastern Europe. During the period April 1990 to March 1991, 45 medicinal products imported from Belgium and 12 medicinal products sourced from Greece were examined. No products from eastern Europe were analysed in this period.

Hairdressers

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those local authorities which have registered hairdressing establishments within their areas under section 77 of the Public Health Act 1961.

Mr. Dorrell: There is no requirement under section 77 of the Public Health Act 1961 or any other general legislation for the registration of hairdressing establishments.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Dorrell: The information readily available is shown in the tables. Staff in post figures for the periods prior to 1 April 1987 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Staff complements as such are no longer used, since expenditure is controlled by financial rather than manpower limits.

DHSS permanent staff in statistics division on 1 April

	1987		*1988*	
	Administrative (vacancies)	*Statistical (vacancies)*	*Administrative (vacancies)*	*Statistical (vacancies)*
Grade 3	—	1	—	1
Grade 5	—	7	—	7
Grade 6	—	1	—	1
Grade 7	1	35 (·5)	1	35 (·5)
Senior assistant statistician	—	3·5 (·5)	—	5 (2)
Assistant statistician	—	6	—	7
Senior executive officer	13	—	18	—

	1987		1988	
	Administrative (vacancies)	*Statistical (vacancies)*	*Administrative (vacancies)*	*Statistical (vacancies)*
Higher executive officer	36 (1)	—	43	—
Executive officer	61 (9)	—	69·5 (6·5)	—
Administrative officer	89 (1)	—	89 (3·5)	—
Administrative assistant	28·5 (1)	—	21 (2·5)	—
Personal secretary	8	—	10	—
Total	236·5 (12)	53·5 (1)	251·5 (12·5)	56 (2·5)

DH permanent staff in statistics division on 1 April

	1989		1990		1991	
	Administrative (vacancies)	*Statistical (vacancies)*	*Administrative (vacancies)*	*Statistical (vacancies)*	*Administrative (vacancies)*[1]	*Statistical (vacancies)*
Grade 3	—	1	—	1	—	1
Grade 5	—	6	—	5	—	5
Grade 6	—	—	—	—	1	1
Grade 7	1	25 (1·5)	—	24·5 (4)	2	21·5 (3)
Senior assistant statistician	—	2 (2)	—	6	—	8·5
Assistant statistician	—	3	—	2	—	5
Senior executive officer	12 (1)	—	8	—	9	—
Higher executive officer	29 (6)	—	24 (3)	—	23·5	—
Executive officer	51 (3)	—	41 (3)	—	49	—
Administrative officer	56·5 (5)	—	55 (6)	—	52	—
Administrative assistant	17·5	—	15 (2)	—	12	—
Personal secretary	6 (1)	—	5 (1)	—	5 (1)	—
Total	173 (16)	37 (3·5)	148 (15)	38·5 (4)	153·5 (1)	42·3 (3)

[1] Budget allocation vacancies equate to two executive officer posts.

OPCS Permanent Staff in Statistical Divisions on 1 March

	1987		1988	
	Administrative Statistical/ Technical		*Administrative Statistical/ Technical*	
Grade				
3	—	—	—	—
5	—	3	—	3
6	1	1	2	1
7	6	11	7	13
Senior Assistant Statistician	—	4	—	2
Assistant Statistician	—	1	—	2
Chief Medical Officer	1	—	—	—
Senior Medical Officer	2	—	2	—
Chief Social Survey Officer A	1	—	1	—
Chief Social Survey Officer B	5	—	3	—
Principal Social Survey Officer	12	—	15	—
Senior Social Survey Officer	12	—	13	—
Social Survey Officer	5	—	6·5	—
Assistant Social Survey Officer	4	—	4	—
Principal Research Officer	1	—	1	—
Senior Research Officer	—	—	—	—
Senior Executive Officer	14	—	17	—
Higher Executive Officer	51·5	—	52·5	—
Executive Officer	91·5	—	92·5	—
Administrative Officer	209·5	—	197·5	—
Administrative Assistant	67·5	—	66	—
Personal Secretary	19	—	18·5	—
Total	503	20	498·5	21

OPCS permanent staff in statistical divisions on 1 March

	1989		1990		1991	
	Administrative /Technical	*Statistical*	*Administrative /Technical*	*Statistical*	*Administrative /Technical*	*Statistical*
Grade 3	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	3	—	3	—	3
6	1	1	1	1	2	1
7	10	14	10	14·5	11	12·5
Senior Assistant Statistician	—	2	—	2	—	5
Assistant Statistician	—	3	—	4	—	3
Chief Medical Officer	1	—	1	—	1	—
Senior Medical Officer	1	—	1	—	1	—
Chief Social Survey Officer A	1	—	1	—	1	—

	1989		1990		1991	
	Administrative /Technical	Statistical	Administrative /Technical	Statistical	Administrative /Technical	Statistical
Chief Social Survey Officer B	4	—	5	—	5	—
Principal Social Survey Officer	15	—	13	—	15	—
Senior Social Survey Officer	11	—	10	—	9	—
Social Survey Officer	4·5	—	4·5	—	11	—
Assistant Social Survey Officer	4	—	10	—	6	—
Principal Research Officer	1	—	1	—	1	—
Senior Research Officer	—	—	—	—	0·5	—
Research Officer	—	—	—	—	2·5	—
Senior Executive Officer	17	—	23·5	—	25·5	—
Higher Executive Officer	57·5	—	59·5	—	84·5	—
Executive Officer	93	—	111	—	136·5	—
Administrative Officer	253	—	261·5	—	246	—
Administrative Assistant	60	—	66	—	43	—
Personal Secretary	18	—	19·5	—	18·5	—
Total	552	23	598·5	24·5	620	24·5

Health Education Authority

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Health Education Authority/Health Education Council to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92;

(2) if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Health Education Authority/Health Education Council; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts;

(3) what was the total expenditure by the Health Education Authority/Health Education Council on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Maitland, the chairman of the Health Education Authority, for details.

Charges

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing prescription, dental and optical charges in April 1979 and April 1991 in current and constant prices showing both the cash and real increase for each charge.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table sets out the latest available information in relation to prescription and dental charges. No comparable figures for optical charges are available because the supply of NHS spectacles ceased in July 1986. Information relates to financial years.

Prescription charges

	£
1979-80	0·20
1990-91 (current prices)	3·40
1990-91 (1979-80 prices)	1·48

Average dental charge

	£
1979-80	6·83
1989-90 (current prices)	25·02
1989-90 (1979-80 prices)	10·82

Catherine Murphy

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will instigate an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the case of Catherine Murphy, whose family were wrongly informed of her death;

(2) when he expects to be able to reply to Councillor Neil Cardwell regarding the case of Catherine Murphy, who is at present an in-patient of Rainhill hospital, Rainhill, Merseyside.

Mr. Dorrell: The St. Helens and Knowsley health authority has apologised unreservedly to Miss Murphy's relatives and is conducting an urgent inquiry. I have asked it to keep me informed. I am writing to Councillor Cardwell today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

St. John Ambulance Brigade

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what facilities he is providing to staff in his Department to contribute to the appeal that has been launched for people with the name of John to help raise £5 million for the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Mr. Leigh: "Give as you Earn" facilities are available within the Department for staff to contribute to this, as with any other appeal, and as they feel appropriate.

Bakery Industry

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance has been given to Golden West Foods in respect of investment in a bakery and distribution centre in Rochdale.

Mr. Leigh: All applications for assistance by companies from my Department are treated in strictest confidence. However, a press release on 14 January 1991 announced with the consent of the company that a grant of £1·5

million under the regional selective assistance programme had been offered to Golden West Foods Ltd. for a bakery development at Heywood industrial park, Rochdale.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the criteria for assistance to the bakery industry; whether that industry is assessed to be in balance between sales and productive capacity; and what steps are being taken to monitor the creation of projected extra jobs.

Mr. Leigh: Neither my Department nor the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has schemes for assistance specifically tailored to the bakery industry. In common with the rest of industry, the bakery trade may be eligible for regional selective assistance where a project meets the criteria of the scheme. Projects must create or safeguard jobs and satisfy other criteria such as viability, the need for assistance and benefits to the national and regional economy. The advice of MAFF would be sought as to prevailing conditions in the market at the time of any application. My Department monitors the creation of extra jobs in the industry, arising from new capital investment which has received support under RSA, in accordance with the conditions of the grant.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reasons underlie the rejection of the application for aid by Warburton's Ltd. for their new bakery in Newburn, and for a second investment in that bakery.

Mr. Leigh: It is not normal practice to provide details of individual cases where these have been supplied in confidence by a business to the Department. I should be happy to look into the matter if the hon. Member would like to write to me with further details.

Northern Development Corporation

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grants are made available to the Northern development corporation; and whether he has discussed with it the case for devoting more interest and attention to Cumbria.

Mr. Leigh: The Northern Development Company has been offered a grant of £1·33 million in the current financial year for its inward investment promotion activities in the north-west of England. DTI funding for inward investment in the north-east, including Cumbria, is provided through INWARD, which receives a grant of £990,000. NDC also carries out general economic development activities in Cumbria, but this does not receive DTI funding. The NDC is already increasing its activities in Cumbria. My Department has discussed this on several occasions with the company.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Leigh: The tables show the available information. The Department's statistical services have been subject to a number of organisational and machinery of government changes which need to be taken into account when comparing the data for different years. In particular, a major part of the Department's statistical work and associated staff (including the business statistics office) were transferred to the Central Statistical Office on 31 July 1989.

Table A shows the information for the business statistics office for each year from 1 April 1980 to 1 April 1989. Tables B and C show the information for the Department's two central statistical divisions from 1 April 1981 to 1 April 1989. On 1 April 1980, the central statistical divisions were part of the Department's economics and statistics divisions, and table D shows the staff in post for these as at 1 April 1980. Following the transfer of statistical work to the Central Statistical Office, the remaining statistical work was distributed among a number of divisions within the Department in 1989-90. A further departmental reorganisation combined the statistical work of the Department to form part of the economics, market intelligence and statistics division in 1990-91. The information from 1 April 1990 is shown in table E. Detailed allocations have not yet been finalised for April 1992.

The following points should also be noted in reading the tables:

1. The staff in post figures count part-time staff as half and exclude casual staff.

2. The allocation of posts to grade is not available for April 1980.

3. With the introduction of unified grading, the chief statistical and statistician grades were absorbed into grades 5 and 7 respectively.

4. Following the creation of the economics, market intelligence and statistics division in 1990-91, some administrative staff work for both economists and statisticians. The figures for 1 April 1991 only include that proportion of time spent supporting statisticians.

Table A
Business Statistics Office

The following figures relate to the position as at 1 April of each year

Grade	1980	1981		1982		1983		1984		1985		1986		1987		1988		1989	
	Staff in post	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts
G3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief Statistician	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
G6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
G7	13	12	12	10	11	10	10	8	10	7	7	18	19	18	19	19	19	20	20
Statistician	8	11	10	12	10	11	10	11	11	11	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	2	4	6	4	6	4	6	4	7	5	7	3	9	3	9	3	9	4	10
Assistant Statistician	1	2		3		3		1		1		3		3		3		2	
SEO	29	29	28	26	26	25	25	22	23	21	20	21	21	21	21	20	21	20	21
HEO	91	101	103	96	101	92	96	80	84	76	78	80	79	80	80	80·5	79	84	80

The following figures relate to the position as at 1 April of each year

Grade	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984		1985		1986		1987		1988		1989	
	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts
EO	237	238	250	235	233	203	207	180	188	180	188	192·5	194	186	186	176·5	185	189·5	184	
AO	371	338	352	327	325	304	313	277	283	251	263	261	259	242	248	237	247	239	242·5	
AA	128	126	132	119	128	113	115	97	105	83	90	79	81	70·5	71	59·5	61	59	63·5	
PS	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	5	5	4	6	6	6	6	6	7	6	
Librarian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Assistant Librarian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Typing Manager	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Typist	24	22	23	19	22	19	21	19	19	16·5	14	14	16	15	15	14	15	12	15	
Senior Messenger	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	—	2	2	
Messenger	16	17	17	17	16	16	16	13	13	9	10	8	9	8	9	8	—	8	9	
Chief Paperkeeper	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Senior Paperkeeper	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	
Paper Keeper	13	11	9	10	8	8	8	8	6	8	7	6	6	4	4	3	4	3	3	
Office Keeper II	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	
Reprographics I	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Reprographics II	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Teleprint Operator	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Telephonist	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	
Total	970	946	977	914	921	842	862	751	780	697·5	722	711·5	720	676·5	689	648·5	664	646·5	673	

Table B
Statistics 1 Division

The following figures relate to the position as at 1 April of each year

Grade	1981		1982		1983		1984		1985		1986		1987		1988		1989	
	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts
G3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief Statistician	6	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	—	—	—	—
G5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	3	3
G7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11	11	11	12
Statistician	17	17	16	14	14	14	12	12	12	12	11	11	12	12	—	—	—	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	2 / 12		2 / 10		3 / 8		1 / 7		3 / 7		— / 7		2 / 7		1 / 7		2 / 7	
Assistant Statistician	4		4		3		3		1		3		5		3		—	
SEO	3	3	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
HEO	18	19	16	15	13	13	12	12	12	12	12	11	9	11	8	8	9	8
EO	33	32	30	24	22	21	19	17	19	17	15	14	13	14	16	14	16	14
AO	65·5	65	56·5	46	35·5	37	28	29	28	28	20	19·5	16	18·5	18·5	16	18·5	17·5
AA	7·5	8	4·5	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	—	1	2	1	3	3	2	3
PS	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Paper Keeper	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Principal Research OFF(R)	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	164	167	143	126	106·5	109	86	88	86	87	70	72·5	70	72·5	69·5	68·5	66·5	70·5

Table C
Statistics 2 Division

The following figures relate to the position as at 1 April of each year

Grade	1981		1982		1983		1984		1985		1986		1987		1988		1989	
	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts	Staff in post	Posts
G3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief Statistician	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—
G5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	3	3	3	3
G7	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	3	8	8·5	9	8·5	8·5
Statistician	8	8	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	5	—	—	—	—	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	2 / 3	6	4 / 2	6	5 / 2	6	2 / 1	6	2 / 1	5	1 / 2	6	1 / 2	5	3 / 1	6	2 / 2	6
Assistant Statistician	3	2	2		1		1		1		2		2		1		2	
SEO	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—
HEO	12	11	13	12	13	12	12	11	11	11	11	11	12	11	10	11	9·5	11
EO	21	24	22	24	22	25	24·5	23	22	22	23	24	18	25	16	20	19·5	18
AO	55	59	56	56	47·5	51	42·5	43	38·5	41	46·5	47	42·5	46	43·5	44·5	39·5	41
AA	3	2	2	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	5·5	3	5·5	7	5	4	5
SPS	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
PS	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	2	4
Paper Keeper	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	115	121	116	120	109·5	116	104	105	97·5	102	105·5	111·5	96·5	107·5	99	104·5	94	98·5

Table E

Grade	SIP 1 April 1990	Posts 1 April 1990	SIP 1 April 1991	Posts 1 April 1991
Grade 5	1	1	1	1
Grade 7	11	11	10·6	10·5
Senior assistant statistician	3	6	2	2
Assistant statistician	1	—	1	2
HEO	5	5	2·5	2·5
EO	13	15	11	11
AO	14	17	10	10
AA	3	3	1	1
PS	1	1	1	1

Grade	SIP 1 April 1990	Posts 1 April 1990	SIP 1 April 1991	Posts 1 April 1991
Support grade 2	1	1	—	1
Total	53	60	40·1	42

Table D

Economics and statistics division

	SIP 1 April 1980
G3	5
Chief Statistician	10
Statistician	30
S/Assistant Statistician	8
Assistant Statistician	4
S/Economic/Advisor	8
Economic/Advisor	19·5
S/Economic/Assistant	10
G7	3
SEO	4
HEO	42
HSO	1
EO	77
AO	145·5
AA	9
SPS	2
Principal Research Officer	4
S/Research Officer	1
Research Officer	1
PS	19
Paper Keeper	1
Total	404

Insolvency Cases

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets he has set the Insolvency Service executive agency for 1991-92.

Mr. Redwood: I expect the insolvency service to continue to bring proceedings for the disqualification of directors of failed companies, and to submit prosecution reports where there is evidence of criminal behaviour in all appropriate cases. In addition I have set it output targets of completing the administration of at least 14,500 cases in 1991-92, while examining in detail one in 20 of all bankruptcy and liquidation accounts received from independent insolvency practitioners.

The quality of service targets for 1991-92 are: to report to creditors on assets and liabilities within nine weeks in at least 75 per cent. of cases; to hold the initial meeting of creditors within 12 weeks on at least 90 per cent. of all cases; to check and action at least 93 per cent. of payment requisitions within 10 days or by the due date; to submit reports within 10 months in at least 80 per cent. of cases identified for investigation.

I would like to congratulate the chief executive and his staff on their success in improving quality of service last year while significantly increasing their efficiency. For 1991-92. I have asked the chief executive to secure a further 5 per cent. increase in productivity in case administration, as measured by both the initial handling of cases and their closure. I have also toughened the target for a reduction in real terms for the average unit cost of the initial stage of bankruptcies and liquidations, so that it is now a 37 per cent. reduction over the period 1990-91 to 1992-93.

Environment Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether his Department *(a)* received an invitation to attend and *(b)* had any participation in the second world industry conference on environmental management held in Rotterdam on 9 to 12 April;

(2) when his Department received a copy of the recommendations made to Governments contained in the final declaration of the second world industry conference on environmental management dated 12 April.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* An official from the Department's environment unit attended this conference as a delegate. Like other delegates he received a copy of the final declaration, including the recommendations to Governments at the final session of the conference on 12 April.

Cornish Tin Mining

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when the Department received an official response from Carnon Holdings to his Department's decision to withdraw funding from the Cornish tin mining industry;

(2) what was the response of Carnon Holdings to his Department's decision to withdraw funding from the Cornish tin mining industry;

(3) when his Department officially notified Carnon Holdings of the decision to cease funding for its tin mining operations; and what prior discussions with the company had taken place;

(4) when his Department took the decision to withdraw funding from the tin mining industry.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* Numerous discussions and other contacts have taken place since early 1990 on the question of the viability of Carnon Holdings Ltd.'s tin mining project, a precondition for advances of DTI loan money. The decision not to advance any further money to Carnon was made and conveyed orally to the company on 22 February 1991. It was confirmed in writing on 25 February. Carnon replied to the Department on 25 February enclosing its press release of the same date announcing its response to the decision.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the reasons for his Department's non-payment of the first instalment of £1·7 million to Carnon Holdings Ltd. to finance Cornish tin mining operations.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to my speech in the Adjournment debate on 6 March at colums 431-438. I explained inter alia that the Government had come to the conclusion that the tin mining project was not viable in the longer term. The rules of financial and parliamentary accountability then meant that we could not make any further payments under the loan.

Appledore Shipbuilders

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and industry if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement in the efforts of Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd. to secure an order from A. P. Moller for platform supply vessels.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 April 1991]:* Since this is a commercial matter, I regret that I am unable to make a statement.

Cumbria (Assisted Areas)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to designate any new assisted areas in Cumbria; which districts will be affected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 April 1991]:* I do not anticipate further changes to the assisted areas map during this Parliament.

Kuwait (Oil Fires)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the reply of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 18 April, if he will make bulldozers and other relevant equipment available to the Government of Kuwait to assist in fighting the oil fires; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 23 April 1991]:* It is for the firefighting contractors selected by the Kuwaitis to determine and make available the necessary equipment. As yet, British companies are not directly involved in firefighting, but the Government are actively supporting proposals from British groups to provide a wide range of services which are needed to deal with the oil fires.

Building Work

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the number and location of all new buildings or extensions commissioned by his Department in each of the past five years which *(a)* had contracts worth between £3 million and £5 million and *(b)* had contracts worth more than £5 million.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* Before 1 April 1988, my Department had no responsibility for funding major new buildings or extensions on the Government's civil estate. My Department has since commissioned one project covered by the question. This was for a new building at Newport in Gwent in the more than £5 million category, started in 1988-89.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give separate figures for the spending of his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 13 March 1990 columns *173-74*. Expenditure from the Department's central publicity budget over the past two years was as follows:

£000s

	1989-90	*1990-91*[2]
Television advertising	5,084	3,938
Radio advertising	540	141
Press advertising	3,506	1,801
Other promotional materials[1]	4,037	3,867

[1] Publication, Audio-visual materials and posters.
[2] Estimated.

Precise media allocations for the current year are not available, but expenditure is likely to be within the 1990-91 total.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of his Department.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 26 April 1991]*: Separate figures for the years before 1987-88 are not readily available. The complement of the Department's press office on 1 April over the past five years has been as follows, with the number of staff in post shown in parenthesis:

Year		
1987-88	51	(51)
1988-89	51	(51)
1989-90	41	(37)
1990-91	39	(37)
1991-92	39	(38)

The current total includes 16 clerical and other support posts.

WALES

Council Housing

14. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new houses were completed by district councils in Wales during 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of dwellings completed by district councils in January and February 1991 was 16; in 1990 a total of 551 dwellings was completed. Some 544 dwellings were under construction by district councils at the end of February 1991.

Foreign-owned Companies

15. **Mr. Grist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees in Wales work for *(a)* EC-owned firms and *(b)* other foreign-owned firms.

Mr. David Hunt: Some 63,000 people are currently employed at overseas-owned manufacturing plants in Wales. Of these, 14,000 are employed at plants in the ownership of EC countries other than the United Kingdom and 49,000 at other overseas-owned plants.

Special Treatment Centres

17. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend beyond April 1992 the funding by his Department of the special treatment centres for hip and knee replacements at Rhydlafar hospital, for hernias and varicose veins at Bridgend general hospital and for cataract surgery at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The existing treatment centres are already proving successful in providing speedy treatment for patients with key disabling complaints and are expected to remain an effective source of treatment under the recently introduced contracting arrangements. Decisions on future funding will be taken in the light of experience during 1991-92, but it is not intended that central funding should continue indefinitely.

Training Organisations

18. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if, during his discussions with the chairmen of TECs in Wales on 7 May, he will include advice on the advisability of ensuring that chief executive officers and monitoring officers are not only experienced but qualified to determine whether approved training organisation status should be awarded to training organisations.

Sir Wyn Roberts: All TEC chairmen in Wales are aware of their responsibility to ensure that all staff are adequately qualified to perform the duties assigned to them.

Local Government Reform

19. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for another tier of local government in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

21. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on local government and constitutional reform in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Several, some in favour of reform and some against.

26. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the conclusions he has reached in relation to the reorganisation of local government in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have reached no conclusions. I propose to issue, early in the summer, a consultation paper identifying the factors which would need to be borne in mind in considering any reorganisation.

Local Government Finance

20. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of local authorities in Wales to discuss local government finance.

Mr. David Hunt: On 23 April, to explain the Government's proposals for a new council tax to replace the community charge.

27. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the relative percentages of revenue raised for local government expenditure from charge payers, business rate payers and central Government grant.

Mr. David Hunt: The overall effect of the local government finance settlement for 1991-92, taken together with the community charge reduction schemes that I have introduced this year, is that the average community charge payable in Wales will be around £92 before taking account of community charge benefit. This means that community charge payers are expected to contribute 8 per cent. towards budgeted spending with 21 per cent. being financed from non-domestic rates and the rest coming from a range of central Government grants.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of local government expenditure in Wales is currently raised by the poll tax.

Mr. David Hunt: Eight per cent.

Employment Training

22. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate for *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and *(b)* Mid Glamorgan of employment training expenditure in 1990-91 and 1991-92, respectively.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The employment training budget now administered by the Mid Glamorgan training and enterprise council for the financial year 1991-92 is £5·6 million. Comparative figures for 1990-91 are not available. Figures for the areas of Merthyr and Rhymney are not produced.

Prince of Wales Hospital, Rhydlafar

23. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he proposes to make to enable in-patients at St. Nicholas ward, Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar, to remain there after its proposed closure date of 30 April to complete their in-patient treatment.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on Friday 19 April 1991 at column *276*.

As the implementation of approved service changes is a matter for health authorities, I have not discussed the timing of the transfer of the children's orthopaedic service in South Glamorgan with the chairman of the district health authority. Nor do I have plans to issue any general guidance on this particular aspect of service planning.

Information Technology

24. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the growth of the information technology industry in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The information technology sector in Wales has grown from a limited base in the late 1970s into a substantial sector now. For example, in the electronic sector alone employment grew by 89 per cent. between 1978 and 1990.

Abattoirs

25. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the initiatives he intends to take to increase the number of EC-approved abattoirs in Wales by 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: Responsibility for complying with the EC measures to harmonise standards for abattoirs by 1

January 1993 rests with the industry. The Government consider that the abattoir industry should plan for this urgently, and I have taken every opportunity to encourage those involved to take the necessary steps to ensure that they comply with the new standards.

New Hospital, Neath

28. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to make an announcement about the building of the new hospital for Neath.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has today announced his decision approving the proposal of West Glamorgan health authority to build a new district general hospital for Neath and Port Talbot at Baglan moors, Port Talbot.

Inward Investment

29. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of inward investment into Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Inward investment has made a very significant contribution to the transformation of the Welsh economy in recent years, a contribution that is being maintained at very high levels. The financial year 1990-91 was again a record year for inward investment to Wales, with 147 projects secured promising nearly 15,000 jobs.

Further Education

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning the proposed change in funding and management of the further education sector in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department has received three representations on this matter.

Severn Estuary (Birds)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to designate as a special protection area under the 1979 EEC wild birds directive the inter-tidal mudflats on the Welsh side of the Severn estuary so far proposed for designation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on Thursday 25 April by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

School Nurses

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to bring schools into line with workplace law which stipulates that there must be a person on the premises with first aid qualifications for every 150 employees; and whether he will give consideration to appointing fully qualified nurses in schools with over 500 pupils.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Local authorities have duties, as employers, to provide first aid facilities for all their employees, including those in schools. These duties are set out in the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and more specifically in the Health and Safety (Training for Employment) Regulations 1981 made under that Act. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has no plans for extending these duties to cover non-employees.

However, the Health and Safety Commission's approved code of practice on first aid at work recognises that employers, such as local education authorities, whose premises are regularly attended by non-employees may wish to make some provision for them. The recommendation of both the Welsh Office and HSE is that such employers may consider, among other matters, the total number of people on a site when assessing first aid needs. In the case of schools, the responsibility for making such an assessment rests with the employer.

All local education authorities in Wales were sent the code of practice in February and asked to review the situation at the schools and colleges for which they have a general health and safety responsibility and to determine what practical measures needed to be given priority in order to reach or maintain the recommended minimum standards for first aid.

The appointment of qualified nurses in schools is a matter for determination locally.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

		1979		1980		1981		1982	
		Staff in post	*Complement*	*Staff in post*	*Complement*	*Staff in post*	*Complement*	*Staff in post*	*Complement*
Professional posts									
Senior economic adviser	(Grade 5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief statistician	(Grade 5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Statistician	(Grade 6)	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	7
Statistician	(Grade 7)								
Principal research officer	(Grade 7)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Economic adviser	(Grade 7)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Senior assistant statistician		3	5	2	4	2	4	—	4
Assistant statistician		2		1		—		1	
Administrative posts									
Higher executive officer		1	4	5	4	4	2	1	—
Executive officer		14	18	11·5	14	11	14	12	15
Administrative officer		30	33	31	30·5	29·5	30·5	28	28
Senior data processor		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—

	1979		1980		1981		1982	
	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement
Administrative assistant	4·5	5·5	4	4	3	4	4	6
Data processor	·5	·5	·5	·5	·5	·5	·5	—
Personal secretary	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

		1983		1984		1985		1986	
		Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement
Professional posts									
Senior economic adviser	(Grade 5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief statistician	(Grade 5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Statistician	(Grade 6)	5	7	5	10	6	12	9	12
Statistician	(Grade 7)								
Principal research officer	(Grade 7)	—	1	—		—		—	
Economic adviser	(Grade 7)	1	1	1		1		—	
Senior assistant statistician		1	4	5·5	8	[1]6·5	8	[1]6·5	8
Assistant statistician		2				[2]3		[2]2	
Administrative posts									
Higher executive officer		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Executive officer		14	15	15·5	17	16	17	19	19
Administrative officer		29	28	23·5	21	23	22	26	25
Senior data processor		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Administrative assistant		4	4	3	5	5	5	5	5
Data processor		2·5	2	2·5	2·5	2·5	2·5	2·5	2
Personal secretary		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

		1987		1988		1989		1990		1991
		Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post	Complement	Staff in post
Professional posts										
Senior economic adviser	(Grade 5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0·5
Chief statistician	(Grade 5)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Statistician	(Grade 6)	8·5	13	—	13·5	1	1	1	1	1
Statistician	(Grade 7)			10·5		11	11	12	13·5	10·5
Principal research officer	(Grade 7)	—				1·5	1·5			1·5
Economic adviser	(Grade 7)	—				1	1			1
Senior assistant statistician		[1]7	9·5	8·5	9·5	6	8·5	7·5	9·5	6
Assistant statistician		[2]3				1	1	2	—	3
Statistical computing officer		—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Administrative posts										
Grade 7		19	19·5	15	16·5	—	—	—	—	1
Higher executive officer		25·5	29·5	22	21·5	1	—	1	—	2
Executive officer		—	—	—	—	16	16·5	11·5	16·5	14·5
Administrative officer		6·5	6	5·5	5	19	21·5	19·5	21·5	24
Administrative assistant		—	—	—	—	7·5	5	5·5	5	6
Personal secretary		2	2	—	2	2	2	2	2	1·5
Typist		—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Senior assistant statistician and senior research officer combined.
[2] Assistant statistician and research officer combined.

Note:
Since the introduction of delegated budgeting arrangements, the formal complement is no longer the basis for staffing.

Accidents in Children's Play Areas

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has about accidents in children's play areas; and what steps he intends to take to make them safer.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department of Trade and Industry compiles statistics relating to accidents in a wide range of recreational environments including playgrounds. A copy of its 12th annual report of home accident surveillance systems, that for 1988, is in the Library of the House. Table LASS 2, page 46 presents accidents in playgrounds split by age. Information on playground accidents is also held by the Health and Safety Executive. I expect that a joint Department of Education and Science and Welsh Office advice on safety in school play areas will be issued to local authorities later this year.

Expenditure in Schools

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the expenditure per pupil on (i) books and (ii) equipment in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in cash and real terms since 1976.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Local authority expenditure per pupil on text books, library books, educational equipment,

stationery and materials in primary and secondary schools since 1976-77 is shown in the table. Reliable information on text books and equipment is not separately available.

	Primary[1]		Secondary	
	cash	constant prices[2]	cash	constant prices[2]
1976-77	9·3	27·4	16·9	49·8
1977-78	10·2	26·5	18·0	46·7
1978-79	11·9	27·8	20·9	48·9
1979-80	12·7	25·5	22·8	45·7
1980-81	14·6	24·7	25·2	42·7
1981-82	16·2	25·0	28·4	43·9
1982-83	18·5	26·7	33·5	48·3
1983-84	19·8	27·3	37·4	51·6
1984-85	17·9	23·5	39·9	52·4
1985-86	20·0	24·9	41·3	51·4
1986-87	22·5	27·1	57·4	69·1
1987-88	23·9	27·3	58·2	66·4
1988-89	25·3	26·9	64·4	68·5

[1] Primary includes nursery schools.
[2] Cash prices revalued to 1989-90 prices using the GDP deflator.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Head Teachers (Appraisal)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his plans for the appraisal of head teachers.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend's plans are set out in the drafts of the regulations he proposes to make on school teacher appraisal and of the associated departmental circular. The drafts were sent out for consultation to representatives of the employers, teacher associations and others on 23 April 1991: copies have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Special Schools (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of places in special schools in each local authority in London by category *(a)* as at 1 April 1990 and *(b)* as at 1 April 1991.

Mr. Fallon: Information on the number of special school places is not available centrally. The number of pupils in maintained special schools within the London boroughs is given in the table. These figures reflect the position as at January 1990, the latest date for which information is available.

Number of pupils in special schools by LEA for Inner and Outer London boroughs

	Maintained special schools Number of pupils
201 City	—
202 Camden	421
203 Greenwich	732
204 Hackney	663
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	481
206 Islington	333
207 Kensington and Chelsea	98
208 Lambeth	956
209 Lewisham	505
210 Southwark	578
211 Tower Hamlets	484
212 Wandsworth	740
213 Westminster	219
Inner London boroughs	6,210
301 Barking	186
302 Barnet	343
303 Bexley	268
304 Brent	369
305 Bromley	384
306 Croydon	479
307 Ealing	439
308 Enfield	416
309 Haringey	326
310 Harrow	244
311 Havering	257
312 Hillingdon	377
313 Hounslow	495
314 Kingston upon Thames	251
315 Merton	240
316 Newham	471
317 Redbridge	405
318 Richmond upon Thames	177
319 Sutton	285
320 Waltham Forest	734
Outer London boroughs	7,146
Greater London	13,356

Youth Service (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out the amount of money spent in *(a)* Greater London, *(b)* inner London and *(c)* Southwark on the youth service in each of the financial years from 1979 to 1991 inclusive; and what was the amount budgeted in each of the same areas for 1991-92, both absolutely and as a proportion of the total education budget.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is shown in the table. The latest year for which information on actual spending is available is 1988-89. This information is taken from local education authorities' spending returns and is not collected for particular areas within a local education authority. The information requested on amounts budgeted is not collected.

Net recurrent spending[1] on the Youth Service

	Greater London (£000)	ILEA (£000)
1979-80	18,500	11,338
1980-81	22,998	14,168
1981-82	27,011	16,597
1982-83	30,712	19,300
1983-84	34,505	21,699
1984-85	35,584	22,726
1985-86	[3]36,568	23,725
1986-87	[2]43,054	27,193
1987-88	[3]46,545	30,535
1988-89	[3]53,559	35,377

[1] Excluding costs of financing capital expenditure, and specific grant income.
[2] One Outer London authority did not submit a return.
[3] Two Outer London authorities did not submit a return.

Pupil Numbers (Southwark)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the projection of population of all residents, residents under 11 years, pupils between 11 and 18 years and pupils under 11 years on which his Department is working for each of the years 1990-91 to 2000-1 inclusive in *(a)* Southwark and *(b)* each of the parliamentary constituencies within the London borough of Southwark.

Mr. Fallon: The Department does not engage in the planning of educational services at local education authority or constituency level. This is a matter for the individual authorities concerned.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils are awaiting assessment of their special educational needs in each London local education authority at the latest date for which figures are available; what is the average delay between requests for and issuing of statements; what additional financial and human provision is made in each case to ensure statementing as soon as possible; what proposals he has for speeding up the procedure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: This information is not collected centrally. The responsibility for carrying out assessments of special educational needs rests with the local education authorities. Advice and guidance in relation to the procedures for assessments and statements made under the Education Act 1981 is given in circular 22/89, which was issued jointly by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health in September 1989.

Southwark (Official Visits)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all official visits made by Ministers, in each case with the name of the Minister and the date, to schools or institutions of education in the London borough of Southwark in each year from 1979 to 1991 inclusive.

Mr. Fallon: Records of ministerial visits are not available as far back as 1979. However, in the last two years DES Ministers have visited a number of schools and colleges in inner London boroughs, including Southwark. The then Minister of State visited Sumner nursery and Surrey Square junior and infants schools in Southwark on 23 January 1990. Earlier this year, on 26 March, my hon. Friend the present Minister of State visited the London Nautical School.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the information he has available on the names of those local authorities which have not made full payment of tuition fees to institutions of higher education for the current academic year; and if he will indicate the amounts of the sums unpaid;

(2) what information he has on the percentage of fee payments due to institutions of higher education from local authorities for the autumn term 1990 and the spring term 1991 which remains unpaid;

(3) if he will take steps to ensure that those local authorities which have not paid in full the tuition fees owed to institutions of higher education for the first two terms of the current academic year do so.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1990 require local education authorities to pay tuition fees promptly to academic institutions on behalf of their mandatory award holders. I understand that a significant proportion of the autumn term 1990 fee instalments remained unpaid at the end of that term and that there were delays in paying the spring term 1991 instalments, but that the majority of both instalments have now been paid. I am awaiting further information from the bodies representing universities and polytechnics on the amounts still outstanding and the individual local authorities at fault. I deplore unnecessary delays in payment. The Department issued clear guidance last year on good practice deadlines for fee payment. All authorities have recently been reminded again of this guidance and the statutory requirements, and urged to settle outstanding fees. The Department is taking action with any individual authorities found to have substantial payments still overdue. Measures are being developed to improve the processing of fee payments for the coming academic year.

Women Scientists

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what study he has made of the census, why more women are not doing scientific and technical work since August 1990; and what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to convince girls and young women that such opportunities for physicists are open to all, in the light of demographic changes.

Mr. Eggar: The employers concerned have the prime responsibility for making scientific and technical careers attractive to women. Nevertheless, this Government's education reforms include some relevant initiatives. The science component of the national curriculum will reinforce that aspect of the education of pupils to age 16, both boys and girls. This will help to ensure that pupils will be less likely to have career options prematurely closed to them and will be better placed to make informed choices about whether to follow a career in a scientific discipline.

The Women into Science and Engineering campaign (WISE) fosters equal opportunity links between education and industry and stresses the importance of eliminating and stereotyping in option choice and careers advice. The WISE campaign has continued to be promoted and five WISE buses, sponsored and maintained by industry, and with support from the Government, continue to give careers advice to girls.

For mature students, there are available some access courses which cater exclusively for women; for example, in micro-electronics, engineering, and information and industrial technology.

Teacher Training

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the initial teacher training courses upon which the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education has made recommendations to him, categorised according to whether *(a)* all relevant criteria are satisfied, so that he was recommended

to approve the course under schedule 5 to the Education (Teachers) Regulations Act 1982, *(b)* a recommendation for schedule 5 approval was made conditional upon further progress within a specific timetable, *(c)* no recommendation was made and *(d)* he was recommended to withhold or to withdraw approval; and in each case whether he has accepted the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education recommendation.

Mr. Fallon: Since 1 January 1990, when the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education was reconstituted, the Secretary of State has approved on its advice the courses listed in the table. He has also withdrawn aproval on the council's advice from work and the urban environment as a main subject specialism in the BEd (Hons) primary course at the polytechnic of North London. There are no courses where approval has been given subject to conditions.

My right hon. and learned Friend is currently considering advice from the council on 17 further courses.

Courses accredited on the advice of CATE since 1 January 1990

Goldsmith's College

Art Teachers' Certificate (secondary) course.
PGCE primary course.
PGCE secondary course.
BEd (Hons) (primary) course.
BEd (Hons) (secondary) course.

Keele University

Biology as additional main subject method specialism in PGCE (secondary) course.

University of Cambridge and Homerton College

PGCE (primary, lower years) course.
BEd (Hons) (primary) course.

Polytechnic of North London

BEd (Hons) primary course: main subject specialisms in Health, Physical Education and Recreation Studies; Language, Literature and Media Studies; Mathematics, Computing and Technology.

University of Warwick

PGCE (secondary) course.
BA (Hons) with QTS (primary) course.
BA (Hons) with QTS (secondary) course.

Anglia College of Higher Education

Two year BEd (secondary) course in Music.

Kingston Polytechnic

Music as a main subject method specialism without a second subject method specialism in PGCE (secondary) course.

Manchester Polytechnic

Two year BEd (secondary, 11-16) course in Chemistry.
Two year PGCE (secondary, 11-16) course in Chemistry.
Two year part-time PGCE (secondary, 11-16) course in Chemistry.

Brunel University

Two year part-time PGCE (secondary) in Physics.

West London Institute of Higher Education

BEd (Hons) (primary) course.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the reports completed since 1983 by Her Majesty's inspectorate on institutions responsible for teacher education and training and indicate the date of publication of the report and, for university departments of education, which opted not to publish their reports.

Mr. Fallon: The reports issued by Her Majesty's inspectorate since 1983 on institutions responsible for teacher education and training are listed in the table.

Reports on the university of Nottingham and the university of Newcastle, available in 1985 and 1988 respectively, were not published.

Published HMI reports on institutions responsible for teacher education and training since the end of 1983

Name	*Date published*
Kingston Polytechnic	21 June 1984
Chelmer Institute	13 July 1984
Middlesex Polytechnic	28 August 1984
Humberside College of Higher Education	30 August 1984
Rolle College	13 September 1984
Bretton Hall College	29 November 1984
University of Exeter	10 December 1984
University of Newcastle	11 December 1984
Hertfordshire College of Higher Education	24 January 1985
Christ Church College, Canterbury	19 February 1985
Birmingham Polytechnic	27 March 1985
University of Bristol	27 March 1985
Westhill College	25 April 1985
University of Bath	5 April 1985
University of Durham	19 June 1985
St. Mary's College, Twickenham	3 September 1985
West Midlands College of Higher Education	3 September 1985
University of Sussex	17 September 1985
University of Leicester	25 September 1985
Liverpool Institute	8 October 1985
Portsmouth Polytechnic	6 December 1985
University of Reading	11 December 1985
University of Loughborough	26 December 1985
University of Sheffield	31 December 1985
College of St. Paul and St. Mary	3 January 1986
Manchester Polytechnic	23 January 1986
Sheffield City Polytechnic	24 January 1986
Bishop Grosseteste College	7 February 1986
College of St. Mark and St. John	19 March 1986
Edge Hill College of Higher Education	7 May 1986
The Polytechnic of Wolverhampton	27 May 1986
Bath College of Higher Education	3 June 1986
West London Institute of Higher Education	13 June 1986
Newman College	17 June 1986
Bulmershe College of Higher Education	24 June 1986
St. Martin's College	2 July 1986
La Sainte Union College of Higher Education	13 August 1986
Worcester College of Higher Education	18 August 1986
University of Southampton	28 August 1986
University of Cambridge	19 September 1986
University of York	9 December 1986
Polytechnic of South Bank	23 December 1986
King Alfred's College of Higher Education	28 January 1987
Oxford Polytechnic	5 February 1987
Liverpool Polytechnic	14 February 1987
Trinity and All Saints College	25 February 1987
University of Hull	26 February 1987
Brighton Polytechnic	27 February 1987
University of Leeds	3 March 1987
Manchester Polytechnic	31 March 1987
Nene College	27 March 1987
Bedford College of Higher Education	14 April 1987
Bradford and Ilkley Community College	14 April 1987
North Riding College	21 April 1987
West Sussex Institute of Higher Education	15 May 1987
Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education	21 May 1987
Newman College	26 June 1987
University of Warwick	8 July 1987
Bristol Polytechnic	9 July 1987
Brunel University	17 July 1987
Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic	15 July 1987
The College of Ripon and York St. John	23 July 1987
Trent Polytechnic	24 July 1987
Charlotte Mason College	14 August 1987
Leeds Polytechnic	15 September 1987
Roehampton Institute	15 October 1987
University of London, Institute of Education	20 October 1987
University of Manchester	30 October 1987
University of East Anglia	20 November 1987
Polytechnic of North London	18 December 1987
Goldsmith's College	27 January 1988
University of Keele	9 February 1988

Name	Date published
University of Liverpool	4 March 1988
University of Birmingham	5 March 1988
Chester College	25 February 1988
University of London, King's College	20 May 1988
University of Oxford	2 June 1988
Leicester Polytechnic	12 July 1988
Thames Polytechnic	25 August 1988
Sunderland Polytechnic	7 September 1988
Jews College	20 September 1988
Derbyshire College of Higher Education	26 October 1988
Birmingham Polytechnic	28 October 1988
Christ Church College, Canterbury	8 November 1988
Essex Institute of Higher Education	28 February 1989
St. Martin's College	22 March 1989
Bath College of Higher Education	4 May 1989
Bradford and Ilkley Community College	28 August 1989
Liverpool Polytechnic	18 November 1989
West Sussex Institute of Higher Education	22 November 1989
Brighton Polytechnic	1 March 1990
Nene College	10 July 1990
West London Institute of Higher Education	30 October 1990
University of Durham	21 November 1990
Nottingham Polytechnic	16 November 1990
St. Mary's College, Twickenham	4 December 1990
Manchester Polytechnic	24 April 1991

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many courses of initial teacher education and training have been considered by the central Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education; how many are pending; how many have been accepted; and how many have been rejected.

Mr. Fallon: Since 1 January 1990, when the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education was reconstituted, 94 courses have been submitted to it for consideration. Of these, 37 so far have been the subject of advice to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by local education authority the number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools taking placement of trainee teachers (i) as part of their course and (ii) for their induction year.

Mr. Fallon: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to complete the formal approval procedure for postgraduate certificate of education and B.Ed. teacher training courses presently operating under temporary approval.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend will complete the accreditation process as soon as he is satisfied that all the courses presently operating under temporary approval fully meet the criteria.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many courses of initial teacher education and training have been scrutinised by local Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education committees; and, of these, how many have been accepted and how many rejected.

Mr. Fallon: Since 1 April 1990, when the new local committees came into being, they have considered a total of 80 courses. Of these, 75 have been put forward to the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and five courses have been referred back to the institutions concerned.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the colleges of teacher education and training and university and polytechnic departments of education visited by Education Ministers in the last six months.

Mr. Fallon: The college of Ripon and York St. John and the Roehampton institute.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he has issued during the last five years to local education authorities and schools in the induction of newly trained teachers.

Mr. Fallon: Advice on the induction of newly trained teachers is contained in administrative memorandum No. 1/90, "The Treatment and Assessment of Probationary Teachers".

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he plans to publish the next Her Majesty's inspectorate report on the "New Teacher in School".

Mr. Fallon: Her Majesty's inspectors expect to undertake an inspection in the summer of 1992 of those newly trained teachers who took up their first appointments in September 1991. A report will then go to my right hon. and learned Friend for him to consider publication.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he collects on the operation and cost of the system of teacher induction.

Mr. Fallon: Under the programme of grants for education support and training, we collect information from the local education authorities which are claiming support for induction training. In the current financial year, over 70 per cent. of authorities are planning to claim support specifically for provision in this area.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Eggar: Copies of tables containing the available information have been placed in the Library.

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, East of 22 April in relation to total spending on higher education student support in the form of mandatory awards, if he will provide the information on cash expenditure, real expenditure with 1978-79 = 100, and expenditure per student, disaggregated between expenditure on fees and expenditure on maintenance.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The data requested are given in the table and cover expenditure made by local education authorities in England and Wales in bestowing mandatory awards under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations.

Academic year	Expenditure (cash £m) fees	maintenance	Expenditure (real index) fees	maintenance	Expenditure per student (£) fees	maintenance
1978-89	197·1	271·9	100	100	616	850
1979-80	217·8	332·2	95	105	675	1,030
1980-81	281·1	398·2	106	108	840	1,190
1981-82	340·0	443·3	115	108	959	1,250
1982-83	208·6	472·0	66	108	563	1,274
1983-84	217·1	502·1	65	109	564	1,306
1984-85	226·4	480·2	65	99	573	1,215
1985-86	238·4	457·7	64	89	611	1,173
1986-87	245·1	479·6	64	91	622	1,216
1987-88	262·3	503·1	66	92	649	1,244
1988-89	278·7	547·0	66	94	671	1,317

The real index has been calculated using the retail prices index. In 1982-83, expenditure on fees is affected by a reduction in the rate set for first degrees and diplomas from £900 to £480 with compensating increases in the direct funds paid to institutions.

Antarctica

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had about the presence in the Antarctic of debris from British research programmes; and what action is being taken to clear up such debris.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Apart from two parliamentary questions from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 9 May 1990, *Official Report*, column *184*, the Secretary of State has received no representations.

The British Antarctic Survey has now formulated and is implementing its up-to-date environmental management policy covering the disposal of debris and wastes. This phased programme is intended to comply fully with recommendation XV-3 of the XVth Antarctic treaty consultative meeting held in October 1989. All waste, other than human waste and scrap food, will be removed from Antarctica.

Abandoned bases are being surveyed prior to the development of a programme of remedial work. Clean-up activities took place at Deception island, Winter island and Halley base during the 1990-91 season.

Colleges of Further Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the provisions of the Education Reform Act in respect of opting-out are to be made applicable to colleges of further education.

Mr. Eggar: No. As my right hon. and learned Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 21 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns 432-48, the Government propose to introduce new legislation to take all further education colleges out of local authority control.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what limit he sets in the extent of delegated powers relevant to the running of such an institution that may be delegated to the governing body of a further education college by the relevant local education authority;

(2) if he will list the powers which may be delegated to a governing body under local management of schools to colleges.

Mr. Eggar: The local education authority, in consultation with the governing body, is responsible for determining, in accordance with the scheme of delegation drawn up by the local education authority under section 139 of the Education Reform Act 1988, the general educational character of a college and its place in the local education system. The governing body is responsible, in accordance with the scheme, for the general direction of the college.

The powers which may be delegated to college governing bodies are listed in paragraph 4.11 of DES circular 9/88 "Education Reform Act 1988: Local Management of Further and Higher Education Colleges: Planning and Delegation Schemes and Articles of Government", a copy of which is held in the Library.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the limit of the extent of control over capital building and revenue maintenance programmes that can be assumed by a further education college.

Mr. Fallon: Control of the major capital building programme currently rests with local education authorities. Responsibility for minor capital works, structural repairs and maintenance can be split between local education authorities and their colleges, according to the scheme of delegation. Responsibility for minor repairs and maintenance rests with the colleges.

Foundation for Sport and the Arts

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what calculations were involved in arriving at the estimate given by the Minister for Sport at a press conference at the Queen Elizabeth conference centre on 23 April that the total amount of money that would go to the proposed Foundation for Sport and the Arts would be £75 million.

Mr. Atkins: I gave illustrative figures. Under the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, the reduction in pool betting levy from 40 per cent. to 37·5 per cent. would on present estimates channel about £20 million a year into the foundation. A further £40 million or so would be given by the pools promoters. If turnover increased the yield could be greater.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on how many occasions he has intervened to prevent a local education authority from delegating functions to a further education college.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which ad hoc budgets not subject

to formula funding may be delegated to a further education college for administration, with the approval of the education authority.

Mr. Eggar: If the local education authority wishes, all funds for administration services can be delegated to a college. In most approved schemes local education authorities were permitted to earmark funds for certain services and to require colleges to use those sums to buy the services from their local education authority. Local authorities were required, however, to ensure that over a three-year period colleges were given increased discretion, particularly over services provided to support colleges.

School Meals

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the results from the 1990 school meal census showing the numbers and proportions of children taking (i) paid school meals, (ii) free school meals and (iii) making their own arrangements in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* in all three.

Mr. Fallon: This information is available in "Statistics of Education: Schools 1990", pages 137 to 145, which was published on 23 April 1991. Copies are being placed in the Library.

Expenditure in Schools

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the expenditure per pupil on (i) books and (ii) equipment in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in cash and real terms since 1976.

Mr. Fallon: Figures returned by local education authorities for spending on books and equipment separately need to be treated with caution because of differing local authority practices in classifying spending between the two items. The table therefore shows, for each year for which information is available, spending figures per pupil for books and equipment together as well as for books and equipment separately.

Expenditure per pupil[1]—England

	Books		*Equipment*		*Books and Equipment*	
	Cash (£)	*Real terms[2] (£)*	*Cash (£)*	*Real terms[2] (£)*	*Cash (£)*	*Real terms[2] (£)*
Nursery and Primary						
1975-76	2·92	9·19	6·70	21·11	9·62	30·31
1976-77	3·25	9·02	7·35	20·39	10·60	29·41
1977-78	3·63	8·85	7·84	19·14	11·47	28·00
1978-79	4·23	9·32	8·64	19·02	12·88	28·34
1979-80	4·67	8·81	9·69	18·28	14·36	27·08
1980-81	5·30	8·45	10·79	17·19	16·08	25·64
1981-82	5·88	8·55	12·31	17·90	18·19	26·45
1982-83	6·96	9·45	13·96	18·95	20·93	28·41
1983-84	7·10	9·22	15·74	20·42	22·84	29·63
1984-85	7·25	8·95	16·35	20·19	23·60	29·14
1985-86	7·46	8·73	17·50	20·49	24·95	29·22
1986-87	8·22	9·30	19·91	22·54	28·13	31·84
1987-88	9·01	9·68	21·63	23·24	30·64	32·92
1988-89	8·95	8·95	23·19	23·19	32·14	32·14
Secondary						
1975-76	5·08	15·99	13·51	42·54	18·58	58·53
1976-77	5·71	15·84	14·46	40·13	20·17	55·97
1977-78	6·31	15·39	15·04	36·72	21·35	52·11
1978-79	7·16	15·77	17·24	37·94	24·40	53·71
1979-80	7·82	14·75	18·79	35·44	26·61	50·19
1980-81	8·08	12·88	21·17	33·76	29·26	46·64
1981-82	8·60	12·50	23·58	34·28	32·18	46·78
1982-83	9·89	13·42	26·65	36·17	36·53	49·59
1983-84	10·09	13·09	29·12	37·78	39·21	50·87
1984-85	10·15	12·53	32·38	39·98	42·53	52·51
1985-86	10·66	12·49	34·17	40·01	44·83	52·50
1986-87	13·13	14·86	44·02	49·82	57·15	64·69
1987-88	14·82	15·92	47·37	50·89	62·19	66·82
1988-89	14·32	14·32	55·46	55·46	69·79	69·79

[1] The figures are based on local education authority returns to DOE and pupil number returns to DES.
[2] The cash figures for earlier years have been repriced to 1988-89 prices using the Gross Domestic Product (Market Prices) deflator.
[3] Figures for nursery schools and for primary schools are not collected separately.

Play Areas (Accidents)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about accidents in children's play areas; and what steps he intends to take to make them safer.

Mr. Atkins: The Department of Trade and Industry's accident statistics cover a range of recreational environments including playgrounds. A copy of the 12th annual report of the home accident surveillance system has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Certain accidents must also be reported to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.

The Government are concerned to ensure that children's playgrounds are as safe as possible. At this Department's request, the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit is preparing a booklet on playground safety for distribution to local authorities and other

operators. A complementary departmental guidance booklet on school playgrounds and related safety issues is in preparation.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish a table showing for 1970, 1973, 1979, 1985 and the latest available date the numbers employed in each of the industries by maximum and sub-division in which import penetration or export proportion now exceeds 20 per cent.

Mr. Jackson: Employment statistics for these periods for the United Kingdom are not available below the two digit level of standard industrial classification. The available information is as follows:

Employees in employment in those manufacturing industries where import penetration or export proportion exceeded 20 per cent. at June 1989[1]
United Kingdom
(unadjusted)

Thousands

Standard industrial classification 1980	*Division or class*	*[2] June 1971*	*June 1973*	*June 1979*	*June 1985*	*December 1990*
Other mineral and ore extraction, etc.	2	1,281·8	1,238·3	1,146·9	778·7	719·5
Metal manufacturing and extraction of metal ores and minerals[3]	21–23	510·7	479·9	422·7	216·8	189·6
Chemical industry/man-made fibres	25/26	449·6	440·0	445·2	342·3	329·0
Metal goods, engineering, vehicles	3	3,708·8	3,572·0	3,374·0	2,443·4	2,293·1
Mechanical engineering	32	1,148·5	1,061·9	1,044·5	764·0	743·7
Office machinery and data processing equipment	33	91·8	79·3	73·9	87·9	80·5
Electrical and electronic engineering	34	809·4	808·9	761·1	595·6	559·2
Motor vehicles and parts	35	507·5	513·5	466·3	274·0	244·9
Other transport equipment	36	438·3	413·5	390·3	288·3	259·2
Instrument engineering	37	139·5	134·6	130·0	104·6	89·6
Other manufacturing industries	4	3,074·5	3,031·7	2,731·8	2,139·6	2,087·8
Textiles	43	526·9	503·7	390·6	245·3	197·7
Manufacture of leather and leather goods	44	40·4	38·7	33·5	21·5	18·9
Footwear and clothing	45	501·9	486·3	418·0	312·1	292·4
Timber and wooden furniture	46	264·1	284·1	251·1	209·8	245·7
Paper, printing and publishing	47	580·6	560·2	548·3	482·6	487·1
Rubber and plastics	48	253·8	267·8	242·7	195·5	221·5
Other manufacturing	49	107·6	107·7	110·2	77·0	77·6

[1] Latest date for which import penetration/export proportion ratio can be calculated.
[2] The earliest date for which figures are available on a consistent basis.
[3] The calculation of import/export proportion ratios is not appropriate for class 21 (extraction and preparation of metalliferous ores). However, it is not possible to separate estimates of employees in employment in this class from those in classes 22 and 23, both of which have import penetration or export proportion ratios of over 20 per cent.

Training (South-east London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all those organisations and individuals who have made representations to him about cuts in training for the year 1991-92 so far announced for south-east London.

Mr. Jackson: I receive many representations from a variety of organisations and individuals on a wide range of issues.

Separate records of each of these issues are not maintained.

Sheltered Housing Staff

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to establish a mandatory system of national training qualifications for sheltered housing staff.

Mr. Jackson: I have no plans to introduce a mandatory system of national training qualifications for sheltered housing staff. However, under the programme to develop national vocational qualifications for all occupations the housing lead body is currently developing national vocational qualifications for those employed in housing activities. The development of NVQs for sheltered housing

staff is part of that programme, and I am confident that relevant qualifications will be available by mid-1992, in line with Government targets.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds were registered unemployed in each of the past 18 months in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland.

Mr. Jackson: The information can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Training Agency/Manpower Services Commission to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson: Expenditure by the Training Agency, and its predecessors, the Training Commission and the Manpower Services Commission, on management consultancy for the years 1984-85 to 1989-90 was as follows:

	£ thousands
1984-85	128
1985-86	191
1986-87	403
1987-88	238
1988-89	215
1989-90	28

The estimated outturn for 1990-91 is around £150,000. Following recent reorganisation of the Employment Department, the former Training Agency is now an integral part of the Department's headquarters. The Department's management consultancy budget for 1991-92 will be reported to the House in due course. Information for the periods 1979-80 to 1983-84 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, (1) in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts;

(2) in the statistical divisions in the Training Agency/MSC; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers of staff, by grade, employed on 1 April 1991 in statistical divisions in the Department of Employment headquarters—including statistical sections previously in the Training Agency—the Employment Service Agency and the Health and Safety Executive are as in the table below. The number of permanent staff included is close to the current complement. The complement of casual administrative staff varies over time. More such staff will be employed as necessary to process the 1991 "New Earnings Survey" and the 1991 census of employment.

The information readily available for earlier years has already been given, in replies to the hon. Member on 15 March 1990, 15 March 1989 and 21 July 1988.

Staff in post in ED group statistical divisions (as at 1 April 1991—part-time staff shown as proportion of full time)

Grade	*Number*
Statistical grades	
Grade 3 (director of statistics)	1
Grade 5 (chief statistician)	5
Grade 6 (statistician)	1
Grade 7 (statistician)	23·7
Assistant/senior assistant statistician	24
Total statistical grades	54.7
Administrative grades	
Grade 7	2
Senior executive officer	10
Higher executive officer	23
Executive officer	51·5
Administrative officer	124·4
Administrative assistant	36
Senior/personal secretary	7
Total administrative grades	253·9
Other staff	
Grade 7 (economic adviser)	1
Senior/economic assistant	3
Senior/research officer	2
Total other grades	6
Total all grades	314·6

Earnings, Northumberland

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of women manual and non-manual workers in Northumberland earned less than £120 per week in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated from the "New Earnings Survey" that in April 1990, 36·5 per cent. of manual and 19·1 per cent. of non-manual full-time female employees on adult rates in Northumberland, whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence, had gross weekly earnings less than £120.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the figure below which the lowest paid 10 per cent. of manual and non-manual women workers earned in the county of Northumberland, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated from the "New Earnings Survey" that in April 1990, the figures below which 10 per cent. of female manual and non-manual employees earned in Northumberland were £96·70 and £105·60 respectively, for full-time female employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the average earnings for manual

and non-manual women workers in the county of Northumberland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated from the "New Earnings Survey" that in April 1990, average gross weekly earnings in Northumberland were £140·40 for manual and £183·90 for non-manual full-time female employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence.

NOW Initiative

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Government intend to take part in the National Operations for Women initiative to promote equal opportunities for employment and vocational training for women, launched by the European Community on 31 January; when he intends to appoint a co-ordinator; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: On 19 April the European Commission notified the amount of funding available to the United Kingdom for NOW. My Department is now in a position to compile the overall operational programme that has to be submitted to the Commission by the end of June. Further details will be announced as soon as possible.

Temporary Employment Scheme

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for a temporary employment scheme for the unemployed.

Mr. Jackson: There are already a wide range of measures available to help unemployed people get back to work. I have no current plans to introduce a temporary employment scheme.

SCOTLAND

Potatoes

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who is responsible for ensuring that Scottish seed potatoes comply with the Seed Potato Regulations 1984; and how the scheme of certification is administered.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Producers and subsequent sellers of seed potatoes are responsible for ensuring that their product complies with the regulations.

The seed potato classification and labelling schemes are administered and enforced by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department under the Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984. Certificates of classification are issued by the Department provided that the growing crop is found on at least two visual inspections to meet the standards prescribed.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what legal recourse, under the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland certification scheme, a potato farmer from outside Scotland has against either the merchant supplier, or the Scottish grower, of virus-infected Scottish seed potatoes supplied.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984, which govern the marketing of seed potatoes in Great Britain, and under which the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department, formerly DAFS, administers the seed potato classification and labelling schemes, do not provide for any form of restitution to purchasers of seed potatoes. Such matters must be pursued through the normal commercial channels. Any purchaser who is not satisfied with goods delivered to him, including seed potatoes, may initiate civil legal proceedings under the Sale of Goods Act.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland takes immediately to inform all merchants and farmers who have taken seed from a Scottish grower in cases where it has firm evidence that a batch of Scottish seed potatoes from that grower has high levels of virus infection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department, formerly DAFS, has no legal responsibility to notify industry bodies in such circumstances.

However, in cases where the Department was in possession of facts which clearly gave rise to concern about the presence of virus it would as a matter of course conduct a full investigation. I understand that my noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for these matters is writing to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what legal penalties are available to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to prosecute growers and merchants who supply Scottish seed potatoes which are found at a subsequent date not to comply with the regulations of certification; and how many prosecutions of Scottish seed potato suppliers for faulty seed there have been in each year for the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the Plant Varieties and Seeds Act 1964, any person who contravenes any provision contained in the seeds regulations may be prosecuted and by summary conviction would be liable to a fine not exceeding £2,000.

There have been two successful prosecutions by the Secretary of State for Scotland in respect of the marketing of seed potatoes in Great Britain under the Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984; one in 1988, the other in 1989.

Drinking Water

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further resources he has allocated to local authorities to bring standards of drinking water up to EC recommended levels; and when he expects all drinking water to comply with EC standards.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Improvements to drinking water quality form part of the water and sewerage capital expenditure programme. For 1991-92 programme provision has been set at more than £169 million, rising to £238 million for 1993-94. The figure for 1993-94 is two thirds higher than the provision for 1990-91 and more than double the level for 1988-89. Authorities may also fund additional capital expenditure from revenue.

The EC standards for drinking water have been incorporated into the Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990. Almost all drinking water put into public supply and which is not subject to

relaxation of specific standards as authorised under the regulations is expected to comply with the EC standards by 1995. Private water supplies which require improvement to comply with the standards are to be the subject of programmes, on which it is planned to issue further guidance later this year.

Local Government Review

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, in his review of local government, he will give consideration to the establishment of an independent commission similar to that being proposed for local government south of the border.

Mr. Lang: I have, of course, given very careful consideration to this matter. I have concluded that the establishment of a commission of the kind which my right hon. Friend has in mind would not be the best or most appropriate way forward for Scotland, where we have a local government system which is less diverse and more coherent, where the scale of the task is very different, and where we already have 16 years' experience of unitary authorities in the islands.

My right hon. Friend proposes a commission which will advise him on changes in different parts of England, on a rolling programme: I do not see a need for a commission working in that way in Scotland. The absence of a commission will not, however, mean a less thorough consultative process in Scotland. We intend to start the consultative process within the next few weeks, by consulting on the broad principles which will underpin the new system.

Water Pollution

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to his answer of 15 April, *Official Report*, column 118, what are the arrangements for specific pollution incidents or other significant water quality failures.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 require a water authority to notify appropriate district or islands councils and health boards of any event affecting drinking water quality which may give rise to a significant risk to public health. The "Guidance on Safeguarding the Quality of Public Water Supplies in Scotland", issued in April 1990, sets out in detail the actions that the water authority should take. These include notifying the Scottish Office Environment Department of any significant water quality failure. A procedure has been agreed whereby the water authority reports initial details of any such incident as soon as possible after its occurrence. The information is updated as the event progresses, until normal water quality is restored.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the reported cases of water pollution in Scotland in each year since 1975.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The full range of information is not available centrally. River purification boards, however, maintain records of water pollution incidents and publish details of these in their annual reports.

Community Care

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to what extent the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 has been implemented in Scotland with reference to community care.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 (Commencement No. 5 and Revocation) (Scotland) Order 1990—SI1990 No. 2510 c65 S212—and to Scottish Office circular SW2/1991, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current and estimated costs of providing community care in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. Community care extends over a wide range of different services and expenditure on it is not separately classified as such. The Government have recognised the costs of the new community care arrangements to local authorities by taking £10 million into account in setting the level of aggregate external finance for 1991-92. Further costs will be considered in the course of future annual settlements of local government finance.

Assisted Reproductive Service

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the Scottish Home and Health Department's national acute services advisory group's review on an assisted reproductive service for Scotland will be complete; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I expect this review to be completed by the autumn of this year and I shall make a statement then.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operations were cancelled or postponed by Lothian health board in each month from January 1990 to March 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest available information is set out in the table.

Number of cancelled in-patient and day case admissions: Total in-patients and day cases

	Number
January	109
February	83
March	118
April	102
May	90
June	94
July	98
August	60
September	83
October	199
November	197
December	117
January	175

MV Antares

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if a date has been set for the fatal accident inquiry into the sinking of the Antares; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Investigations are continuing into the deaths of the crew of the MFV Antares. The date and location of the fatal accident inquiry have yet to be fixed.

Dentists

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dentists were registered with the national health service in Scotland on *(a)* 1 October 1988, *(b)* 1 October 1989, *(c)* 1 October 1990 and *(d)* 1 April 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of dentists registered with the national health service in Scotland on each of the dates in question is as follows:—

	Number of Dentists
(a) 1st October 1988	1,572
(b) 1st October 1989	1,652
(c) 1st October 1990	1,694
(d) 1st April 1991	1,719

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advertising for the Scottish electricity privatisation has been placed in the Northern Ireland press or television; and on what basis the level of advertising there was fixed.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The two Scottish electricity companies share offers are being advertised in Northern Ireland using the national press and business magazines. This is the approach which has been adopted for use in most of the United Kingdom. In Scotland, however, a broader marketing is aimed at the companies' customers.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of his Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* The number of staff in the information officer grades employed in the Scottish Office Information Directorate and the number of vacant posts as at 1 April each year from 1979-80 to 1991-92 is set out in the table:

	Number of staff	*Vacancies*
1979	22	3
1980	24	—
1981	20	1
1982	22	—
1983	20	—
1984	20	—
1985	19	1
1986	20	2
1987	22	1
1988	23	1
1989	28	3
1990	31½	—
1991	33½	—

Listed Buildings (Demolition)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State For Scotland how many listed buildings have been demolished in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole in the past five years; what information he has concerning the circumstances of such demolitions; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* Information is not readily available in the form the hon. Member has requested. The table shows the number of listed building consent applications notified to the Secretary of State in the period in question which involved demolition, either total or partial, and which were cleared for his interest.

Year (1April-31 March	*Strathclyde*	*Scotland*
1986-87	52	142
1987-88	57	154
1988-89	46	124
1989-90	31	107
1990-91	39	95

Information is not gathered on the action taken following the granting of consents. Such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nursery Education

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of local authority nursery school places provided by each of the education authorities, expressed as a percentage of the eligible children in each area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* The table gives, for each education authority, the number of three and four-year-old children attending education authority nursery schools at September 1990 as a percentage of the 1990 mid-year estimate of the total three and four-year-old population, the range which is the relevant age group for nursery education.

Figures for numbers of pupils attending nursery schools have been used because there are no reliable figures for the number of places and because many children attend nursery school part-time.

Number of three and four year olds in education authority nursery schools with percentages in relation to the three and four year old population, September 1990

Education authority	*Three and four year olds in nursery schools September 1990*	*Percentage of three and four year olds in nursery schools*
Borders	470	19·5
Central	2,332	41·4
Dumfries/Galloway	630	17·8
Fife	4,388	47·6
Grampian	3,391	26·1
Highland	730	13·6
Lothian	8,457	45·9

Education authority	Three and four year olds in nursery schools September 1990	Percentage of three and four year olds in nursery schools
Strathclyde	18,911	30·9
Tayside	3,326	34·27
Orkney	102	20·4
Shetland	137	20·5
Western Isles	—	—
Scotland	43,274	33·0

Food Hygiene

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete consultations with interested bodies concerning proposed food hygiene regulations for Scotland; which bodies will be consulted; when draft legislation will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* Comments have been invited by 20 May on our proposals to amend the Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 1959. Following consideration of the results of the consultation, the new regulations will be laid before Parliament; it is proposed that these will come into force from 1 October 1991. The changes were outlined in my reply to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 26 February. The following representative bodies have been consulted.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.
Scottish Food Co-ordinating Committee.
Association of Public Analysts of Scotland.
The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland.
Scottish Milk Marketing Board.
Scottish Dairy Trade Federation.
Company of Scottish Cheesemakers.
Handmade Cheese Association of Scotland.
Scottish Association of Master Bakers.
The Federation of Bakers (Scottish Area).
Sea Fish Industry Authority.
Scottish Fishermen's Federation.
Aberdeen Fish Curers' and Merchants' Association.
Herring Buyers Association.
Glasgow Wholesale Fish Trade Association.
Scottish Federation of Fishermen's Co-operatives Ltd.
Scottish Federation of Fishmongers
The Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland
Scottish Salmon Smokers Association (Mr. H. Neil)
Scottish Salmon Growers Association
Highlands and Islands Fishermen's Association (SG)
British Trout Association
Scottish Salmon Smokers Association (Mr. Norman MacLean)
Scottish Shellfish Growers Association
Scottish Fish Merchants Federation
Shellfish Growers Association
Wholesale Grocers' Association of Scotland
Scottish Grocers' Federation
The Scottish Licensed Trade Association
The Brewers' Association of Scotland
Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association
Meat and Livestock Commission
National Association of Wholesale Meat Salesmen of Scotland
Scottish Quality Beef and Lamb Association
Co-operative Union Ltd
Association of Scottish Chambers of Commerce
National Farmers' Union of Scotland
Scottish Consumer Council
Scottish Trades Union Congress General Council
Institute of Food Science and Technology (Scottish Branch)
Scottish Tourist Board
The National Trust for Scotland
Association of Bed and Breakfast Operators
Scottish Development Agency
Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society
Institute of Refrigeration/Refrigeration Industry Board
British Direct Marketing Organisation
Small Farmers Association
Highlands and Islands Development Board
Hamper Industry Trade Association Ltd
British Railways Board (ScotRail Headquarters)
The Post Office
Road Haulage Association (Scottish Area)
Association for Consumer Research
Consumers Association Ltd
Consumers in the European Community Group
Co-operation Union (Parliamentary Committee)
National Consumer Council
National Consumer Protection Council
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Federation of Womens Institutes
The Brewers Society
British Crayfish Marketing Association
British Egg Products Association
British Retailers Association
British Sandwich Association
British Soft Drinks Council
British Sugar Refiners Association
The Champagne Association
Co-op Milk Trade Association
Crab Processors Association
The Crystalised Fruit Dealers Association
The Delicatessen & Fine Food Association
Federation of British Kippers & Herring Merchants Association
Federation of British Port Wholesale Fish Merchants Association
Federation of Edible Nuts Association
Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers
Federation of Street Traders Union
Fleetwood Fish Merchants Association
Great Yarmouth Mediterranean Herring Exporters Association
Institute of Fisheries Management
Institute of Grocery Distributors
Institute of Market Officers
International Meat Trade Association
Joint Consultative Council of the Fresh Fruit, Vegetable & Flower Industries
Joint Council of British Potato & Vegetable Merchants Association
Livestock Traders Association
London Fish Merchants Association
London Meat Traders Association Inc.
Meat and Livestock Commission
Meat Marketing Board
Mushroom Growers Association
National Association of British Market Authorities
National Council of Associations of Fresh Meat Wholesalers
National Council of Wholesale Egg Distributors
National Dairymans Association
National Dried Fruit Trade Association
National Edible Oil Distribution Association
National Egg Marketing Association
National Egg Producers & Retailers Association
National Federation of Fish Friers
National Federation of Fishmongers Ltd.
National Federation of Fruit & Potato Trades
National Federation of Inland Wholesale Merchants
National Federation of Licensed Victuallers
National Federation of Meat Traders
National Federation of Poultry Meat Merchants
National Federation of Wholesale Grocers & Provision Merchants
National Federation of Wholesale Poultry Merchants
National Game Dealers Association
National Joint Council of British Potato & Vegetable Merchants Association
National Market Traders Federation
National Union of Licensed Victuallers
National Union of Retail Confectioners
North of England Wholesale Grocers Association

Port Wine Trade Association
Potato Marketing Board
Pre-Packed Flour Association
Produce Packaging & Marketing Association
The Retail Consortium
Retail Distributors Association Ltd.
Sherry Shippers Association
Smithfield Market Tenants Association
South Western Fish Buyers & Processors Association
Association of British Meat Processors
Association of British Preserved Milk Manufacturers
Association of British Salters and Curers
Association of Batter, Blender and Butters and Cheese Packers
Association of Butter and Cheese Manufacturers
Association of Cereal Food Manufacturers
Association of Malt Products Manufacturers
Association of Non-Brewed Condiment Manufacturers
Association of Salmon Smokers and Processors
Association of Unpasteurised Milk Producers and Consumers
Automatic Vending Association of Britain
Bacon and Meat Manufacturers Association
The Bakers Union
Bakery Allied Traders Association
The Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate & Confectionery Alliance
The Bristol & District Grocers and Provision Dealers Association
British Broiler Growers Association Ltd.
British Chemical Distribution and Traders Association
British Commercial Rabbit Association
British Compounders Association
British Deer Farmers
British Deer Society
British Essences Manufacturers Association
British Food Manufacturers Industries Research Association
British Glucose Manufacturers Association
British Meat Manufacturers Association
British Oat and Barley Millers Association
British Pearl Barley Millers Association
British Potato Trades Consortium
British Poultry Federation Ltd.
British Poultry Meat Association Ltd.
British Salt Federation
British Sheep Dairying Association
British Snail Farmers Association
British Soluble Coffee Manufacturers Association
British Sugar Corporation
British Turkey Federation Ltd.
Cake and Biscuit Alliance
Civic Catering Association
Cocoa, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance
Coffee Trade Federation
Combined Edible Nut Trade
Commercial Queen Rearer Association
Council of National Bee Keeping Association of UK
Creamery Proprietors Association
Dairy Trade Federation
Danish Bacon Board
Ducks Producers Association
Eggs Authority
The English Herring Catchers Association
Federation of Bakers
Federation of Gelatine and Glue Manufacturers
Food and Drink Federation
Fruit and Vegetable Canners Association
Gin Rectifiers and Distillers Association
Hamper Industry Trade Association
Hops Marketing Board
Ice Cream Alliance Ltd.
Ice Cream Federation Ltd.
Incorporate National Association of British & Irish Millers Limited
Isle of Man Fisherman's Association
Isle of Man Fish Processors Association
Licensed Animal Slaughterers and Salvage
Licensed Horse Slaughterers and Salvage Association
Margarine and Shortening Manufacturers Association
National Association of British and Irish Millers Ltd.
National Association of British Wine Producers
National Association of Cider Makers
National Association of Creamery Proprietors and Wholesale Dairies
National Association of Master Bakers, Confectioners and Caterers
National Association of Perry Makers
National Association of Soft Drink Manufacturers Ltd.
National Cheese Council
National Dairy Council
National Egg Packers Association Ltd.
National Federation of Cold Storage and Ice Trades
National Food and Drink Federation
National Sausage Casing Association
Pet Food Association
Pet Food Manufacturers Association
Poultry Association of Great Britain
Retail Confectioners and Tobacconists Association
Rusk Manufacturers Federation
Salmon and Trout Association
Salt Manufacturers Association
Scotch Whisky Association
Sea Fishing Industry Authority
Sea Products International
Seed Crushers and Oil Processors Association
Self Raising Flour Association
Shellfish Association of Great Britain
Shellfish Industry Authority (Hull)
Snack, Nut and Crisp Manufacturers Association Ltd.
Specialist Cheesemakers Association
Tonic Wine Producers Association
Traditional Farm Fresh Turkey Association
United Kingdom Association of Manufacturers of Bakers Yeast
United Kingdom Cheese Guild
United Kingdom Dairy Association
United Kingdom Egg Producers Association Ltd.
United Kingdom Provisions
United Kingdom Renderers Association
United Kingdom Sugar Industry Association
Vinegar Brewers Federation
Vodka Trade Association
Watercress Growers Association
Wild Boar Association
Association of Casing Importers Ltd.
Brandy Shippers Association
British Association of Canned and Preserved Food Importers and Distributors
Fruit Importers Association
Fruit Juice Importers Association
Imported Meat Trade Association Ltd.
Liquer Importers Association
Advertising Association
Association of British Abattoir Owners Ltd.
Association of British Chamber of Commerce
Association of Railway Preservation Societies
Association of Sea Fishers Committees of England and Wales
Bee Farmers Association
British Association of Ships Suppliers
British Baking Industry Research Association
British Beekeepers Association
British Brush Manufacturers Association
British Ceramic Research and Traders Association Ltd.
British Diatetic Association
British Field Sport Society
British Fishermans Association
British Goat Society
British Independent Grocers Association
British Industries Biological Research Association
British Medical Association
British Ports Federation
British Railways Board
British Standards Institution
British Vetinary Association
British Tourist Authority
Brixham Trawlers Owners Association
Bus and Coach Council
Butter Information Council
Campden Food Preservation and Research Organisation
Chemical Industries Association
Co-operative Union

Flour Milling and Baking Research Association
The Food Hygiene Bureau
Food Manufacturers Industrial Group
Food Policy Research Unit, University of Bradford
The Food Research Institute
Freight Transport Association
GMB Union
International Natural Gums Association for Research
Isinglass Manufacturers Association
Leatherhead Food Research Association
Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and Industry
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry
London Egg Exchange
London Food Commerce
National Association of Health Stores
National Chamber of Trade
National Farmers Union
National Freight Federation
National Institute for Research in Dairying
Joint Council for the Port Transport Industry
National Pharmaceutical Association
National Physical Laboratory
Natural Food Colours Association
North East Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Association
Pea Pickers and Pea Packers Association
The Post Office
Proprietary Association of Great Britain
Research Institute for Consumer Affairs
Tea Buyers Association
UK Provision Trade Federation
British Hotel Federation
British Hotel, Restaurants and Caterers Association
Confederation of Fried Fish Caterers Association
Confederation of Fried Fish Cateries
Hospital Caterers Association
National Association of Catering Butchers
National Catering Federation
Restauranteurs Association of Great Britain
Scarborough Hotels Association
British Frozen Food Federation
British Refrigeration Association
National Cold Storage Federation

In addition, approximately 240 other individuals and organisations have been consulted.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the grant element used for each local authority in Scotland in calculating the tax liability for a house with two or more adults in that authority area in 1991-92 for the purposes of tables 1 and 2 in the annex to the consultation paper, "A New Tax for Local Government".

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* The illustrative figures were calculated at district level, and for this purpose regional community charge income was apportioned to districts in proportion to the community charge tax base. With grant similarly apportioned to districts, the grant amounts assumed for the purposes of the calculation are set out in the table. The figures allow for revenue support grant, community charge grant and grant under the personal community charge reduction scheme.

	Grant total £
Berwickshire	14,414,578
Ettrick and Lauderdale	25,380,818
Roxburgh	27,491,083
Tweeddale	11,368,346
Clackmannan	27,539,962
Falkirk	81,274,179
Stirling	44,617,462
Annandale and Eskdale	27,454,017
Nithsdale	41,675,769
Stewartry	17,721,405
Wigtown	22,758,395
Dunfermline	71,591,125
Kirkcaldy	83,761,661
North East Fife	40,976,839
Aberdeen City	130,510,392
Banff and Buchan	51,047,129
Gordon	45,115,129
Kincardine and Deeside	29,962,875
Moray	51,446,270
Badenoch and Strathspey	9,183,496
Caithness	21,781,863
Inverness	48,782,813
Lochaber	15,157,189
Nairn	8,579,407
Ross and Cromarty	39,539,931
Skye and Lochalsh	10,189,375
Sutherland	11,813,807
East Lothian	39,133,089
Edinburgh City	213,518,570
Midlothian	38,349,029
West Lothian	68,401,040
Argyll and Bute	44,409,721
Bearsden and Milngavie	24,121,307
Clydesbank	31,596,178
Clydesdale	36,677,761
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	38,196,487
Cumnock and Doon Valley	29,106,142
Cunninghame	83,783,569
Dumbarton	47,621,138
East Kilbride	49,765,499
Eastwood	35,653,554
Glasgow City	465,399,616
Hamilton	66,255,835
Inverclyde	61,644,107
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	52,566,746
Kyle and Carrick	72,650,459
Monklands	69,487,982
Motherwell	93,897,412
Renfrew	128,132,921
Strathkelvin	53,883,882
Angus	62,577,035
Dundee City	114,451,379
Perth and Kinross	80,998,493
Total	3,113,414,165

SOCIAL SECURITY

Fraud

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of alleged fraud were detected in relation to *(a)* income support and *(b)* social fraud, which were considered for civil legal proceedings in England, Scotland and Wales in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Jack: The Department does not collect information on the number of cases considered for civil legal proceedings which relate to alleged fraud involving social security payments. A case is accepted for proceedings on the basis that a debt exists, with no distinction being made between fraudulent and non-fraudulent cases. Proceedings will be considered in all cases where the overpayment is £300 or more after other attempts to recover the debt have been exhausted.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including

vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department of Social Security holds no records to show the numbers of statisticians in DHSS before the split of the Department in 1989. Figures for the years since 1989 are shown in the table and give the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the analytical services division of DSS. The figures are not strictly comparable between years because of reorganisation of the Department's analytical services.

Numbers of Staff in statistical divisions on 1 April 1989, 90, 91

	1989			1990			1991		
	Admin.	*Prof.*	*Total*	*Admin.*	*Prof.*	*Total*	*Admin.*	*Prof.*	*Total*
Grade									
1	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	0
2	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	0
3	—	0·33	0·33	—	0·33	0·33	—	0·33	·33
4	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	0
5	—	2	2	—	2	2	—	2	2
6	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	0
7	1	9	10	—	8	8	—	8	8
Senior Assistant Statistician	—	2	2	—	2	2	—	7	7
Assistant Statistician	—	2	2	—	4	4	—	2	2
SEO	2	—	2	—	—	0	—	—	0
HEO	11	—	11	9	—	9	7·5	—	7·5
EO	19·5	—	19·5	12·5	—	12·5	10·5	—	10·5
AO	33	—	33	34·5	—	34·5	33	—	33
AA	7	—	7	6	—	6	5	—	5
S/PES	2	—	2	2·33	—	2·33	2	—	2
Total	75·5	15·33	90·83	64·33	16·33	80·66	58	19·33	77·33

Vacancies in statistical divisions on 1 April 1989, 90, 91

	1989			1990			1991		
	Admin.	*Prof.*	*Total*	*Admin.*	*Prof.*	*Total*	*Admin.*	*Prof.*	*Total*
Grade									
1	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
2	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
3	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
4	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
5	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
6	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
7	—	1	1	—	—	0	—	—	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
Assistant Statistician	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	1	1
SEO	1	—	1	—	—	0	—	—	—
HEO	3	—	1	—	—	0	—	—	—
EO	1	—	1	—	—	0	—	—	—
AO	—	—	0	2·5	—	2·5	—	—	—
AA	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
S/PES	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—	—
Total	5	1	6	2·5	0	2·5	—	1	1

Mortgage Interest Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward proposals to regulate the amount which can be claimed to pay mortgage interest payments on homes.

Miss Widdecombe: Regulations exist to limit the amount which can be paid for mortgage interest through income support where payments are excessive. This is where:

- The accommodation is too large; or
- The accommodation is situated in an unnecessarily expensive area; or
- The outgoings are higher than those on suitable alternative accommodation in the same area.

The restriction—to the amount that the claimant would need to obtain suitable alternative accommodation—applies from the outset of the claim if the claimant could not afford the financial commitment when it was entered into, provided it is reasonable to expect the claimant and family to move. Its application my be deferred for 26 weeks where the commitment was affordable and for up to a further 26 weeks if the claimant is using his best endeavours to obtain cheaper accommodation.

This regulation is, like all social security legislation, kept under careful review.

Benefits

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people in the constituency of Argyll and Bute receiving *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, including death benefit, *(c)* invalidity benefit, *(d)* invalid care allowance, *(e)* severe disablement allowance, *(f)* unemployability supplement and *(g)* child benefit; how many of those in *(a)* to *(f)* also receive child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Information relating to these benefits is not available for individual constituencies.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people in

Scotland receiving *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, including death benefit, *(c)* invalidity benefit, *(d)* invalid care allowance, *(e)* severe disablement allowance, *(f)* unemployability supplement and *(g)* child benefit; how many of those in *(a)* to *(f)* also receive child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The table shows the latest available figures:

Benefit	*Number receiving in Scotland*	*Date to which information relates*
Retirement Pension	809,490	30 September 1990
Widows Benefit	38,510	31 March 1990
Invalidity Benefit	169,300	31 March 1990
Severe Disablement Allowance	33,600	31 March 1990
Child Benefit	609,000	21 February 1991

Widow's payment, which is a lump sum payment of £1,000, may be payable for those women who were widowed after April 1988. Information relating to the number of widows receiving a widow's payment is not available for Scotland.

Information relating to the number of people receiving invalid care allowance and unemployability supplement is not available for Scotland.

Information relating to the number of benefit recipients also receiving child benefit is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount paid out in state benefits, including mortgage interest relief, to people earning more than *(a)* the national average wage and *(b)* two thirds of national average wage at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Jack: The latest available information on benefit payments is for 1987; the closest corresponding period for which information on mortgage tax relief is available is the financial year 1987-88. On this basis, the estimated benefit payments to family units with total gross earnings of more than the specified levels, based on average male earnings, were:

(a) about £6·7 billion;

(b) about £9·7 billion.

Child benefit represents around two thirds of those benefit payments.

Resettlement Unit

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the business plan of the Resettlement Unit executive agency for 1991-92 will be published.

Miss Widdecombe: The 1991-92 business plan has today been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 30th April 1991

TRANSPORT

Aviation Fires

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reliable biological testing has been undertaken of the sprinkler systems proposed for use in passenger transport aircraft at time of aviation fires.

Mr. McLoughlin: The statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation rests with the Civil Aviation Authority. As the answer requires detailed technical information, I have drawn the hon. Member's question to the attention of the Civil Aviation Authority, asking it to write to the hon. Member.

Central Transport Consultative Committee

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any representations from the Central Transport Consultative Committee on the ministerial direction issued in 1988 to British Rail concerning the maintenance of railway passenger services under the Railways Act 1974; and if he proposes to revise it.

Mr. Freeman: Yes; no.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has on the effectiveness of random mass alcohol testing of drivers in securing continuing reductions in drink driving after any one-off drop.

Mr. Chope: The best evidence we have on the effect of random breath testing come from New South Wales. The table below shows its effectiveness in reducing the proportion of drivers and riders killed who were over the limit since its introduction in 1982. Following the effect of an "on-off" drop that might be attributed to the introduction of such a measure, levels have remained largely unchanged.

Proportion of drivers and riders killed, whose alcohol level was known, over the legal limit

	New South Wales per cent.	*Great Britain* per cent.
1982	40	33
1983	36	28
1984	33	26
1985	33	26
1986	34	24
1987	32	23
1988	31	21
1989	33	[1]19

[1] Provisional.

A comparison with the proportional fall in Britain shows that our approach, of seeking to change public attitudes through a carefully targeted campaign, has been more successful.

The legal limit in New South Wales is 50 milligrammes of alcohol per millilitre of blood, compared with 80 in Great Britain.

Crash Casualties

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people die on average in *(a)* motorway fog crashes each year and *(b)* in urban crashes each day.

Mr. Chope: During the five-year period 1985 to 1989, the most recent for which figures are available, there were on average five deaths in Great Britain each year resulting from motorway accidents in fog. Over the same period there were on average seven deaths each day on built-up roads.

Railway Services

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the statutory compliance of railway services with his direction of March 1988 under the Railways Act 1974.

Mr. Freeman: The central transport consultative committee has made a representation about reductions in specific services since March 1988, while at the same time observing that the majority of services provide the same or a better level of frequency. I receive other representations from time to time.

Railway Investment

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if investment in new railway carriages for the services on the Eltham and New Eltham lines has been authorised.

Mr. McLoughlin: Four hundred class 465 Networker vehicles were approved in August 1989. The first of these is due to be delivered to British Rail in September this year. The new trains will begin to come into service on Kent Link routes, which include Eltham and New Eltham, from May 1992. The Department is currently considering an investment submission for further orders totalling 274 vehicles. We will respond as soon as possible.

Cars (Anti-Theft Measures)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends introducing higher specifications and standards for the design of motor vehicles to make them less susceptible to theft.

Mr. Chope: There is already a British standard on vehicle security BS AU 209, which, if complied with by vehicle manufacturers, should make their motor vehicles less susceptible to theft.

My Department has therefore presented proposals to the European Commission for the amendment of the EC directive on vehicle security, based on the requirements contained in the British standard.

These proposals have so far been resisted by some other member states; but with the co-operation of the Society of

Motor Manufacturers and Traders we intend to submit revised proposals and press for their introduction at the earliest possible opportunity.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total sums paid out by my Department in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation are as follows:

£000s

Privatisation	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	[1]*1991-92*
Sale of shares in National Freight Corporation	151	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sale of shares in Associated British Ports	—	1,809	260	1,494	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sale of shares in British Airways plc	—	—	50	1,012	674	20,804	11,364	72	675	47	1
Sale of shares in BAA plc	—	—	—	—	—	564	41,149	3,095	17	1,392	1
Sale of National Bus Company Operations	—	—	—	—	—	635	324	139	49	27	1,098
British Rail Privatisation Study (Consultants' fees)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	94	503	139	805

[1] Estimate.

No expenditure was incurred before 1981-82.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total expenditure on the Department's press and public relations office since 1984-85 is as follows:

	£
1984-85	339,426
1985-86	354,393
1986-87	363,446
1987-88	389,473
1988-89	437,950
1989-90	451,214
1990-91[1]	517,905
1991-92[2]	558,301

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

These figures cover the overall costs of running the press office, calculated using the ready reckoner for staff-related costs.

Before 1984-85 the information division was a common service of the Departments of Transport, Environment and Property Services Agency.

Road Inquiries

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many public inquiries into major new road proposals have been initiated by his Department since 1979; in how many cases the inspector's report was published (1) prior to and (2) simultaneously with the announcement of his directions; and what considerations governed the timing of the publication of the Inspector's report and the announcement of his direction.

Mr. Chope: Figures for the number of public inquiries initiated since 1979 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Reports are invariably published in the event of a decision being taken, and at the same time as the decision is announced. Prior publication would undermine the value of the inquiry and the report. It would not be appropriate to initiate another round of consultations, or to accept further representations, on the inspector's report after the inquiry has given all interested parties an equal opportunity to express their views. Sometimes a provisional decision is announced; the report is published with that provisional decision, and following it an inquiry may be reopened.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many cases, following a public inquiry into a major road proposal, he has decided to adopt proposals that differed significantly from the recommendations made in the inspector's report; and what restrictions there are on his freedom to disregard the recommendations of an inspector.

Mr. Chope: The Secretary of State for Transport makes decisions relating to his own highway proposals acting jointly with the Secretary of State for the Environment. While precise figures are not collected, it is very rare for the Secretaries of State to make decisions which differ substantially from an inspector's recommendation. If the Secretaries of State differ from an inspector on a finding of fact or take into account evidence which was not before the inquiry and by reason of this are disposed to disagree with the inspector's recommendation, they will almost invariably reopen the inquiry, and in certain circumstances they will be required to do so by rule 15 of the Highways (Inquiries Procedures) Rules 1976.

Medals

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange to amend the rules concerning the issuing of medals and replacement medals to include grandchildren of the person entitled to such medals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer Friday 26 April 1991]:* The issue of campaign medals by my Department for services in the Merchant Navy is made in accordance with the rules agreed between the Central Chancery, Orders of Knighthood, and the Ministry of Defence on 21 May 1973. Under these, replacement medals are issued only to the first generation of legal beneficiaries which would exclude grandchildren.

There appears to be no reason to depart from these rules in the case of medals for merchant seamen, about which I have corresponded with the hon. Member.

Light Dues

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fishing boats in the United Kingdom failed to pay light dues in 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer Friday 26 April 1991]:* These figures are not available for the calendar year 1990. Payments of light dues for which they are liable have not yet been made in respect of about 450 fishing vessels for the year beginning 1 April 1990.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer Monday 29 April 1991]:* The tables give the information requested for the complements and permanent staff employed in the directorate of statistics of the Department of Transport. The complement table shows details as at 1 April 1979 and annually from 1 April 1982; the staff in post figures are at 1 April 1979, and, thereafter annually from 1 April 1984. Data for the intervening years on each table are not available. The principal scientific officer between 1984 and 1990 and the economic adviser in 1990 were filling statistical posts.

Directorate of Statistics Staff Complement of Department of Transport

	1 April 1979	1 April 1982	1 April 1983	1 April 1984	1 April 1985	1 April 1986	1 April 1987	1 April 1988	1 April 1989	1 April 1990	1 April 1991
Statistician Group											
Director of Statistics (Grade 3)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief Statistician (Grade5)	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Statistician (Grade 6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Statistician (Grade 7)	13	13	15	16	18	21	21	20	23	23	20
(Senior) Assistant Statistician	4	4	4	6	6	7	8	8	6	8	8
SUB-TOTAL	21	21	23	27	29	33	34	33	34	37	34
Other Staff											
Economic Adviser	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Senior Information Officer	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Senior Executive Officer	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Higher Executive Officer	8	7	7	6	8	8	10	10	9	10	12
Executive Officer	19	18	17	18	22	25	25	29	30	32	31
Administrative Officer (CO)	44	33	33	36	34	31	28	26	27	25	27
Administrative Assistant (CA)	16	9	8	6	7	6	6	5	5	4	4
(Senior) Personal Secretary	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Principal Scientific Officer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Professional and Technical Officer	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Graphics Officer (Typographer)	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
Senior Data Processor	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Data Processor	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Messenger	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUB-TOTAL	112	72	73	76	82	82	80	82	82	81	85
GRAND TOTAL	133	93	96	103	111	115	114	115	116	118	119

Staff in Post in Directorate of Statistics of Department of Transport

	All years as at 1 April								
	1979	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Statistician Group									
Director of Statistics (Grade 3)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chief Statistician (Grade 5)	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Statistician (Grade 6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Statistician (Grade 7)	13	17	18	21	19	20	23	19	18
(Senior) Assistant Statistician	4	4	5	5	7	7	4	5	7
Sub-total	21	26	28	31	31	32	32	30	32
Other Staff									
Economic Adviser	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Senior Information Officer	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Senior Executive Officer	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Higher Executive Officer	7	7	8	9	9	8	9	11	12
Executive Officer	20	18	22	26	24	27	29	30	30
Administrative Officer (CO)	42	34	34	32	30	26	24	26	28
Administrative Assistant (CA)	13	6	7	6	5	5	4	4	3
(Senior) Personal Secretary	3	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	5

	All years as at 1 April								
	1979	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Principal Scientific Officer	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	0	0	2	2	2	1	2	2	3
Professional and Technical Officer	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
Graphics Officer (Typographer)	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Senior Data Processor	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Data Processor	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Messenger	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	104	74	83	86	81	77	77	81	85
Grand Total	125	100	111	117	112	109	109	111	117

Shipping Accident

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the circumstances which resulted in the loss of the trawler Wilhelmina J when in collision with the Cypriot cargo vessel Zulfikar on 10 April; and what actions his Department took subsequently.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The trawler Wilhelmina J collided with the Cypriot registered cargo ship Zulfikar during the early hours of 10 April in the English Channel. The Zulfikar, although aware of the collision, failed to stop. The Wilhelmina J sank with the tragic loss of all six persons on board.

Investigations were begun by both the Cypriot authorities and the marine accident investigation branch (MAIB).

Both MAIB and the Cypriot authorities made immediate and sustained efforts to have the Zulfikar diverted to enable inspectors to interview the master and crew. After initial rejection, the ship's managers agreed on 12 April to divert to a position off Lisbon, where on 14 April an official from the Cypriot High Commission accompanied by inspectors from MAIB boarded the vessel by helicopter to pursue their investigations.

An interim inspector's report has been submitted to the Secretary of State, and a bulletin giving the facts so far established will shortly be issued: a copy will be placed in the Library.

The inspectors have had the full co-operation of the flag state (Cyprus) and as the Zulfikar was manned by Indian nationals, an appropriate report has been sent to the Indian High Commission in London.

The investigation, which has the status of an inspector's inquiry under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations, is continuing. I cannot discuss the circumstances of the accident further at this stage. A full report will be produced when the inquiry is completed, and the inspector's findings will be published unless a formal investigation is ordered.

EMPLOYMENT

Single Mothers

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many single mothers are currently in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment, respectively.

Mr. Jackson: Preliminary estimates from the GB labour force survey for spring 1990 indicate that there were 170,000 single mothers in full-time work and 213,000 in part-time work.

Child Care

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of firms provide child care facilities, on or off-site, for their employees; and what percentage of *(a)* all employees and *(b)* single mothers in employment work for firms which provide child care facilities.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected, but indications are that the provision of such facilities is growing.

Advertising

11. **Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Training Agency or Manpower Services Commission on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is given in the table.

	TV (£)	Radio (£)	Press (£)	Other (£)	Total (£)
Actual					
1979-80	N/A	N/A	—	—	—
1980-81	424,102	4,127	2,496,440	2,588,540	5,513,209
1981-82	—	62,896	1,814,935	2,784,279	4,662,110
1982/83	—	89,654	2,984,230	3,222,031	6,295,915
1983-84	1,479,748	17,434	764,409	2,670,666	4,932,257
1984-85	944,975	3,477	717,057	4,473,283	6,138,792
1985-86	9,676,257	311,537	1,867,286	5,111,180	16,966,260
1986-87	15,624,000	258,631	6,927,370	12,124,000	34,934,001
1987-88	17,321,000	26,841	6,950,159	11,647,000	35,945,000
1988-89	12,569,000	—	5,502,000	12,449,000	30,520,000
1989-90	8,610,000	56,000	6,164,000	12,485,000	27,315,000

	TV (£)	Radio (£)	Press (£)	Other (£)	Total (£)
Estimate					
1990-91	6,115,000	—	3,764,000	11,269,000	21,148,000

The total budget for 1991-92 excluding HSE and ACAS is £17·4 million. Detailed decisions on allocation by media as requested have not yet been taken.

From 1991-92, and following the abolition of the Training Agency in November 1990, the Department's advertising and publicity budget, excluding HSE and ACAS, is to be held centrally.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson: There are fees paid to organisations in furtherance of privatisation by the Employment Department Group—including the former Training Agency and Manpower Services Commission—in the financial period from 1979-80 to 1987-88 inclusive.

Fees to the value of £525,000 were incurred in 1988-89, to the value of £613,000 in 1989-90, and the value of £622,000 in 1990-91. These figures are inclusive of expenses plus VAT.

There is no current privatisation being undertaken, though an outstanding invoice for £30,000 will be paid in the current financial year.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is given in the table.

Year	Expenditure £ million
Actual	
1979-80 to 1985-86	n/a
1986-87	1·08
1987-88	1·014
1988-89	3·185
1989-90	3·331
Estimated	
1990-91	3·564

Notes:

Figures for 1986-87 and 1987-88 are for DE information division only. Figures for TA are not available.

Figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 represent total expenditure separately incurred by DE information services branch; the two merged in November 1989.

Expenditure levels for 1991-92 are in the process of being set.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure by the Training Agency/MSC on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Year	Expenditure (£'000)
Actual	
1979-80	Not available
1980-81	Not available
1981-82	Not available
1982-83	Not available
1983-84	Not available
1984-85	Not available
1985-86	Not available
1986-87	1·08
1987-88	1·014
1988-89	3·185
Estimated	
1989-90	3·331

Labour Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the total number of employees in employment in the northern region in the following categories *(a)* male full-time, *(b)* male part-time, *(c)* female full-time, *(d)* female part-time, *(e)* total male and *(f)* total female, indicating in each case an estimate of the number of such employees paying national insurance contributions.

Mr. Jackson: There is no information relating to national insurance contributions at regional level or on a full-time and part-time basis. The available information is in the table.

Employees in employment in the northern region—Unadjusted

Thousands

	Male			Female		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
September 1989[1]	555·0	40·0	595·0	280·0	240·9	520·9
December 1990[2]	n/a	n/a	587·9	275·1	255·7	530·8

[1] The most recent regional male full-time and male part-time estimates available are from the September 1989 census of employment.
[2] The latest date for which regional estimates are available.
n/a = Not available.

ACAS

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to receive the annual report of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

Mr. Howard: I have received the ACAS report for 1990, which has been laid before both Houses of Parliament today. The report is also published today and copies are available from the Vote Office.

Disabled People (Training)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria are used in deciding if registered disabled persons would benefit from two-year employment training; and how many people had such extended training in the last period for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* Before 1991 the normal period of training for ET was a maximum of one year. People with disabilities for whom extended training would substantially enhance chances of obtaining suitable employment could be offered up to a further year of training.

As from April 1991, all fixed limits on the duration of ET training were removed. From April 1991 trainees are entitled to a reasonable duration of training having regard to the nature and level of the intended qualification or credits, and to the training needs and prior learning of the trainee. Information about the numbers of people with disabilities who had extended training is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

ENERGY

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Wakeham: The estimated expenditure in 1990-91 is £657,000. This figure includes:

(i) forecast expenditure by the press office;

(ii) staff costs (salaries, accommodation and common services) for all permanent information service and support staff in the press office, including the speech writing unit, at 31 March 1991.

The corresponding expenditure for previous years is as follows:

	£
1989-90	615,000
1988-89	475,000
1987-88	460,000
1986-87	293,000

Expenditure for the years prior to 1986-87 is not available on a comparable basis.

Currently proposed expenditure for 1991-92 is £677,000.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Wakeham: Total expenditure on fees paid to outside organisations in relation to the privatisation of Amersham International, Britoil and Enterprise Oil could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. Fees paid to outside organisations in the case of the privatisation of British Gas and of the regional electricity companies and the electricity generating companies in England and Wales are as follows:

	British Gas £ million	*Electricity industry* £ million
1985-86	1·4	—
1986-87	162·4	—
1987-88	10·5	0·8
1988-89	11·1	5·5
1989-90	2·2	12·1

The remaining costs resulting from the privatisation of British Gas and of the regional electricity companies and electricity generating companies, including fees paid to advisers, will be published in due course.

WALES

Epilepsy Unit, Cardiff

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the epilepsy unit at University College Cardiff was closed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The epilepsy unit is independently funded—largely, I understand, by the pharmaceutical industry to facilitate the development and trial of new drugs. It is not an NHS facility. I understand that the unit is to continue to function on a more limited scale. It is the responsibility of health authorities and general medical practitioners to secure the services they regard as necessary for local residents with epilepsy, as for all other conditions.

Specialist Treatment Centres

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that there is no geographical quota which discriminates in favour of any area health authority being able to benefit disproportionately from the three specialist treatment centres for: hip and knee replacement at Rhydlafar hospital, hernias and varicose vein surgery at Bridgend general hospital and cataract surgery at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The targets set for each of the treatment centres reflect local waiting lists but otherwise do not discriminate in favour of the host authority.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that general practitioners throughout Wales can refer their patients direct to the specialist treatment centre funded by his Department for cataract surgery at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The right of general medical practitioners to directly to refer patients to the three treatment centres is ensured by the contractual agreements negotiated between the Welsh Office and the centres.

Opticians

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many opticians were registered in Wales in March 1989.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There were 478 opticians on contract to Welsh FHSAs on 31 December 1989. Of these, 435 were ophthalmic opticians and 43 ophthalmic medical practitioners.

"Social Care Plans"

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the first draft of "Social Care Plans".

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for each social services authority in Wales to decide the distribution of drafts of social care plans. Authorities are required by statute to publish the final version of the first social care plans by 1 April 1992.

Family Health Services Authorities

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if all family health services authorities have now been connected to the all-Wales telecommunications network and the English family health services network.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As a result of changes to the timetable South Glamorgan is currently the only FHSA in Wales connected to the English FHS and the all-Wales telecommunications networks. Arrangements are in hand to connect the remaining seven Welsh FHSAs to both networks during the period 13 to 17 May 1991.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange for the quarterly reports on the performance monitoring of family health services authorities' plans to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The performance monitoring of FHSA business plans, indicated in the "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action 1991-93", will not be the subject of separate report documents but will be part of the continuing management discussions between the NHS directorate of the Welsh Office and FHSAs.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy of all family health services authorities' business plans in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Yes.

District Health Authorities (Telecommunications)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those district health authorities that have not yet submitted their telecommunications strategies for approval and funding.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: All nine Welsh district health authorities have submitted their telecommunications strategies for approval and funding. Funding has been approved for eight authorities. However, further information has been requested from Pembrokeshire health authority.

Trunk Road Improvements

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of his Department's spending on trunk road improvements in Wales for each of the next three years, together with the outturn for 1990-91, and the current planned spending for 1991-92 for such purposes.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As indicated in the Welsh Office departmental report (Cm. 1516), provisional net outturn for motorway and trunk road new construction and improvement in Wales in 1990-91 is £163 million; planned net expenditure in 1991-92 is £147 million. No firm decisions have been taken on the Secretary of State's allocation of block resources for 1992-93 to 1994-95, though provision for the motorway and trunk road programme in Wales is expected to exceed £550 million during this period.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each environmentally sensitive area in Wales and for each year of each scheme's existence the number of applicants for entry, the number of applicants accepted for entry, and the number of unsuccessful applicants who have subsequently withdrawn from each scheme.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is as follows:

	Applications received	*Applications accepted*	*Successful applications withdrawn*
Cambrian Mountains Original Area			
1987	[1]293	34	Nil
1988		71	
1989		27	
1990		23	—
Cambrian Mountains Extension			
1988	[1]367	46	Nil
1989		90	
1990	162	48	
Lleyn Peninsula			
1988	210	84	Nil
1989	101	180	
1990	57	42	

[1] No separate figures available.

Outstanding applications continue to be processed.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount paid to farmers under the environmentally sensitive areas scheme in each of the designated areas for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. David Hunt: Participants in the ESA schemes in the Cambrian mountains original area, Cambrian mountains extended area, and Lleyn peninsula received £477,000, £121,000 and £284,000 respectively in the year ended 31 March 1991.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: No expenditure was incurred by my Department on privatisation prior to 1988-89.

Subsequently, sums were paid in respect of water privatisation. The total sums paid to outside organisations on water privatisation in 1989-90 and 1990-91 were £13·3 million and £0·8 million respectively. Costs incurred in 1991-92 will be reported to Parliament in the usual way.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures for expenditure by the Department's information division, including staff and press cutting service but excluding media advertising and promotional material, cannot readily be disaggregated for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88.

Figures for the succeeding years are:

	£
1988-89	469,000
1989-90	487,000
1990-91	481,000

Estimated budget for 1991-92 is £529,880.

CIVIL SERVICE

"Next Steps" Agencies

38. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service, if he will make a statement on the progress so far achieved by "Next Steps" agencies.

Mr. Renton *[pursuant to his reply, 15 April, 1991, c. 37-39]:* Good progress is being made in setting up "Next Steps" agencies. This month the number of agencies reached 50 and there are now over 200,000 staff working on "Next Steps" lines. Announced candidates for agency status total 23 covering over 20,000 further staff. On top of this, the Inland Revenue will establish by April 1992 33 executive offices with nearly 60,000 staff working along "Next Steps" lines. By then I expect half the civil service to be working fully on "Next Steps" lines. The tables attached set out the existing agencies and announced candidates.

"Next Steps" places great importance on improving the delivery of Government services for all customers. The benefits of the programme can be seen from the numbers of improvements and initiatives which agencies are introducing to enable them to provide their customers with a better, more flexible, service. Agencies are increasingly consulting customers about their needs and where possible tailoring services to meet those needs. Each agency publishes its own annual report describing targets set, providing financial information and setting out what has been achieved. Last October the first annual review of "Next Steps" was published (Cm 1261) giving details of the achievements and improved performance of the agencies then established. I will ensure that this year a further review will be published to bring together for the benefit of the House information from these reports on all the agencies and what they are doing to meet the aims of "Next Steps".

Demanding financial and quality of service targets are being set and delivered for each agency. They demonstrate very clearly that the initiative is succeeding.

"Next Steps"—
Executive agencies established as of April 1991

	Number
Building Research Establishment	69
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	22
Central Office of Information[1]	73
Central Veterinary Laboratory	58
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment[2]	58
Civil Service College	21
Companies House	1,15
Defence Research Agency	11,70
Directorate General of Defence Accounts[2]	2,10
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	5,45
Driving Standards Agency	2,05
Employment Service	35,60
Forensic Science Service	58
Historic Royal Palaces	30
Historic Scotland	58
Her Majesty's Stationery Office[1]	3,30
Hydrographic Office[2]	88
Information Technology Services Agency	3,35
Insolvency Service	1,45
Intervention Board	91
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	32
Land Registry	10,40
Meteorological Office	2,25
Military Survey[2]	85
National Engineering Laboratory	43
National Physical Laboratory	82
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	5
Natural Resources Institute	39
NHS Estates	12
Occupational Health Service	10
Ordnance Survey	2,50
Patent Office	1,15
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	7
Radiocommunications Agency	50
RAF Maintenance[2]	5,70
Rate Collection Agency (Northern Ireland)	28
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	32
Registers of Scotland	1,10
Resettlement Agency	51
Royal Mint[1]	1,05
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	23
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)[2]	2,30
Social Security Benefits Agency	68,00
Social Security Contributions Agency	6,60
Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland)	1,70
United Kingdom Passport Agency	1,20
Vehicle Certification Agency	7
Vehicle Inspectorate[1]	1,65
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	7
Warren Spring Laboratory	32
50 in number	183,46
Customs and Excise[3] (30 executive units)	26,80
	210,260

[1] Trading funds.
[2] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[3] Moving towards full operation on "Next Steps" lines following publication of framework documents.
Staffing figures are based on staff in post on 1 October 1990.

"Next Steps"—activities announced by Departments as under consideration as of April 1991

	Number
ADAS Agency	2,500
Agricultural Scientific Services[1]	130
Central Science Laboratory	340
Central Statistical Office	1,050

	Number
Chessington Computer Centre	440
Child Support Agency[2]	Not yet known
Fire Service College[3]	200
Fuel Suppliers Branch	30
Medicines Safety Division[1]	350
Pesticide Safety Division[1]	160
Planning Inspectorate	570
Pollution Inspectorate	230
Property Holdings	1,650
Public Record Office	430
RAF Training[3]	2,500
Royal Parks	600
Teachers' Pensions Branch	300
The Buying Agency[4]	120
Transport Road Research Laboratory[1]	580
Valuation Office	5,250
Youth Treatment Service	210
Ordnance Survey (Northern Ireland)	200
Social Security Operations (Northern Ireland)	5,000
23 in number	22,840
Inland Revenue[5] (excluding Valuation Office)	59,800
	82,640

[1] Current staffing figures.
[2] From 1 April 1993 the agency is estimated to require 4,500 staff, 1,500 of which will come from the Social Security Benefits Agency.
[3] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[4] Trading fund.
[5] Moving towards full operation on "Next Steps" lines in accordance with the action plan of February 1991: 33 executive offices by April 1992, each with a framework document, sharper accountabilities and wider managerial freedoms.

Notes:
Staffing figures are based on staff in post 1 October 1990, except where specified.
Many other areas are under consideration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passport Control Checks

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what passport control checks will be applied to EC nationals entering the United Kingdom after 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We intend to retain immigration controls on non-EC nationals. In order to ensure that these controls are effective, we believe that it will be necessary to require EC nationals to show their passports or other identity documents.

Regional Scientific Advisers

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each civil defence region *(a)* the number of regional scientific advisers other than the chief regional scientific adviser, *(b)* the number of regional scientific adviser appointments that are currently vacant, *(c)* the average age of the regional scientific advisers other than the chief regional scientific adviser and *(d)* the amounts paid to regional scientific advisers other than the chief regional scientific adviser in each of the last five years in the form of salary, retainer and expenses.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office has responsibility for appointing regional scientific advisers (RSAs) for the nine home defence regions in England and Wales. The Scottish Home and Health Department and Northern Ireland Office have similar responsibilities for their own home defence regions.

RSAs are not paid either a salary or a retainer as part of their civil defence duties. They are paid expenses in the form of professional lecturing fees together with costs for travel and subsistence in the course of their civil defence activities. With the exception of No. 5 region, each of the regions in England and Wales has a wartime operational scientific establishment of four RSAs. No. 5 region has only three. There are currently 43 RSAs appointed by the Home Office who in time of war could be assigned to any of the Home Defence regions; there are no vacancies for the wartime operational establishment.

The average ages of RSAs by region are given in table A. Aggregated figures for lecturing fees, subsistence and travel over the past five years are given in table B. Figures for individual regions and RSAs could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Table A

	Number of RSAs	Average age
Region 2: North East	4	56
Region 3: East Midlands	3	62
Region 4: East	5	63
Region 5: Greater London	5	63
Region 6: South East	7	62
Region 7: South West	4	70
Region 8: Wales	3	61
Region 9: West Midlands	5	58
Region 10: North West	7	58
Total	43	60

Table B
Travel and subsistence/professional fee

	Travel £	Subsistence £	Total £
1986-87	14,458	42,416	56,874
1987-88	17,068	46,933	64,001
1988-89	24,193	44,777	68,970
1989-90	19,007	50,741	69,748
1990-91	[1]—	[1]—	70,515

[1] Separate figures for travel and subsistence not yet available.

Police Time (Witnesses)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if any consideration has been given to transferring the cost of police time spent on duty as witnesses in court proceedings from the Home Office vote to the vote of the Lord Chancellor's office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. A police officer giving evidence in court is acting in pursuance of the general duty of the police to preserve law and order. We have no plans to alter the present arrangements.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy to remove the exemptions which are currently allowed as part of the January 1990 regulations to oblige laboratories to buy only specifically bred cats and dogs from registered suppliers.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Where animals of a species specified in schedule 2 to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which includes cats and dogs, are

not obtainable from designated sources, requests to obtain such animals from non-designated sources will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *335*, what evidence he has received from the Medical Research Council on alleged deliberate breaches of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We received a number of documents on 16 April from the Medical Research Council and we are now considering them.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct inspectors not to allow any dispensation from the requirements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, in the light of the Medical Research Council report on Professor Feldberg; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Medical Research Council inquiry report alleged that a dispensation was agreed at the National Institute for Medical Research, with the approval of the Home Office inspector, which allowed Professor Feldberg and Mr. Stean to leave anaesthetised animals undergoing procedures unattended for short periods.

We have been assured by the director of NIMR that it was at the time and remains NIMR policy that under no circumstances must such animals be left unattended. The inspectorate did not give any dispensation to override these local instructions, nor would such a dispensation be given at any establishment.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Metropolitan Police on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the deputy commissioner that expenditure by the Metropolitan police on all forms of recruitment and other advertising and other promotional material in each financial year since 1979-80 is as follows—it is not possible to give separate spending figures for the years prior to 1987-88:

	£
1979-80	759,000
1980-81	967,000
1981-82	1,062,000
1982-83	1,028,000
1983-84	1,675,000
1984-85	1,747,000
1985-86	1,868,000
1986-87	2,269,000

	Television advertising	*Radio advertising*	*Newspaper advertising*	*Other promotional literature*
	£	£	£	£
1987-88	—	3,000	1,722,000	1,111,000
1988-89	—	6,000	1,881,000	1,258,000
1989-90	472,000	15,000	1,660,000	663,000
[1]1990-91	683,000	59,000	978,000	1,402,000
[2]1991-92	313,000	75,000	1,466,000	1,550,000

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Budget estimate.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The full cost of staff, accommodation and administration for the Home Office press office from 1979-80 to 1989-90 was:

	£
1979-80	283,140
1980-81	392,532
1981-82	381,799
1982-83	424,290
1983-84	516,362
1984-85	560,512
1985-86	606,996
1986-87	548,136
1987-88	599,282
1988-89	674,945
1989-90	715,646

Notes:
The estimated cost for 1990-91 is £786,519.
The budget for 1991-92 is £882,582.
1. Figures supplied before 1986-87 were the costs estimated by the Treasury. After devolved budgeting in 1986 the estimates are based on Home Office costs.
2. Press office figures include the costs for staff, accommodation and administration costs.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: For information up to 1989-90, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the then Home Secretary on 15 March 1990, at column 358. In 1990-91 payments in respect of expenses in furtherance of privatisation of the Independent Broadcasting Authority transmission system are expected to be £767,000. The costs of the current privatisation of the IBA, including fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sale is completed.

Victim Support Schemes

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide financial support to victim support schemes in Manchester, after June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Home Office grant for local victim support schemes will rise to £5·4 million this year from £4·5 million last year, an increase of 20 per cent. Last

year's grant of £328,910 to schemes in Greater Manchester area, mainly for co-ordinators' salaries, is also expected to increase. In addition, the criteria under which grants are administered have been changed for this year to allow running costs as well as salaries to be funded in schemes which would otherwise be at risk of closure because of withdrawal of local authority funding.

HEALTH

Dentures

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now disclose the full findings relating solely to the supply of dentures to the public reported to the then Minister for Health following the inquiry carried out by the Office of Fair Trading from 1983 to 1985.

Mr. Dorrell: The Director General of Fair Trading wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the then Minister for Health on 20 June 1985 following allegations by the Association for Denture Prosthesis that dentists were abusing their monopoly through high prices and profits from the supply of private dentures and that the quality of treatment would improve if dental technicians were allowed to take impressions and fit dentures—a practice called "denturism". In his letter the director general said:

"Denturism appears to have reduced the cost of dentures, including those provided by dentists, in countries without a National Health Service. However, in the United Kingdom the office's survey suggests that dentures can be obtained readily on the NHS although it may be necessary to change dentists, especially in London and the South East, in order to do this. The price is closely controlled by the DHSS and there is no evidence that dentists are making monopoly profits on providing them. It seems unlikely that denturists providing facilities to see patients could provide them much more cheaply. Against any savings would need to be set the cost of additional training for denturists if this was provided at public expense.

In general therefore I am reasonably satisfied that the NHS provides a competitive alternative to private treatment, and I see little justification for the introduction of denturism on economic grounds. We did not assess the arguments about health care and quality of service but found little to suggest they would strengthen the case for denturism in the United Kingdom in present circumstances."

NHS (Highest Paid Employees)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in order the top 10 highest paid employees within the national health service, stating the name of the health authority and the salary in each case.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. Details of payments awarded to individual NHS employees are a confidential matter between employer and employee.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No expenditure prior to 1986-87 has been identified. Expenditure in 1986-87 and subsequent years has been incurred for work by professional advisors on the sale of the General Practice Finance Corporation. The expenditure for each year is as follows:

	£
1986-87	23,000
1987-88	37,800
1988-89	174,621
1989-90	414,000
1990-91	Nil

All expenditure up to and including 1988-89 has been from a joint health and social security budget.

There are no plans for any expenditure in 1991-92.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give separate figures for the spending by the HEA/HEC on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Maitland, the chairman of the Health Education Authority, for details.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Functions which are commonly associated with press and public relations are carried out by the Department's information division, the manpower and running costs of which are:

	£'000s
1989-90	
Expenditure	890
1990-91	
Estimated expenditure	1,279
1991-92	
Budget	1,527

Information for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 is not available in the form requested.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the salaries and pension entitlements of *(a)* the chairpersons, *(b)* the deputy chairpersons, *(c)* the chief executive or manager, *(d)* the other executive directors and *(e)* the non-executive directors of each national health service self-governing trust in the period to 31 March 1991 and in the year 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On the question of the remuneration of NHS trust chairmen, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the Member for Sheffield,

Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 25 January at column *356*. All other non executive directors of NHS trusts are remunerated at a standard rate of £5,000 per annum. Remuneration is taxable and subject to national insurance contributions, but is not pensionable.

The salaries and pension entitlements of NHS trust chief executives and other executive directors are matters for the individual trust boards.

Health Authorities (VAT Increase)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the cost to health authorities in 1991-92 of the increase in the rate of VAT to 17·5 per cent.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities have been asked to provide information to enable us to estimate additional costs following the increase in the standard rate of VAT. Adjustments will be made to health authority provision to reflect these costs.

General Practitioner Fundholders

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total sum of money paid out in start-up and preparation costs for general practitioner fundholders in the financial year 1990-91; and if he will provide such estimates for each of the NHS regions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table provides the estimated expenditure, during 1990-91, on GP fundholding preparatory allowance broken down by regional health authority. Information on other payments made to potential fundholders is not available as it is not separately identifiable.

Region	*Estimated total expenditure 1990-91*
Northern	464,000
Yorkshire	558,481
Trent	438,518
East Anglia	157,353
North West Thames	396,640
North East Thames	186,317
South East Thames	254,000
South West Thames	347,417
Wessex	233,200
Oxford	401,480
South-Western	300,228
West Midlands	450,000
Mersey	335,999
North-Western	312,754
Total	4,372,387

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the cost of making financial transactions internal to the NHS as a result of contracts and general practitioner budgets subject to VAT at the standard rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not available.

Grove Park Children's Home

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the report of the social services inspectorate into Grove Park children's home, Southwark; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The social services inspectorate report into residential child care services in Southwark has been received by the Department and is being considered. It is expected that the report will be published shortly.

Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the full report of the Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy is now available for 1990-91; whether this consultancy is to continue in 1991-92, what estimate has been made of the cost; and what is its programme of work for 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy (IACC) expects to publish its full report in the summer. A copy will be placed in the Library. In 1991-92 IACC will be working on the reduction of waiting time in the West Midlands region. As announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 27 February, we have engaged Qa Business Services to carry forward studies of 80 of the worst lists in 1991-92; £9 million will be available from the waiting list fund to finance the team's recommendations.

Waiting List Initiative

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the schemes agreed for funding from the waiting list initiative fund from the £12 million reserved for Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy recommendations.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The districts and specialties examined by Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy and the funding allocated from the waiting list fund is given in the table.

Schemes which received funding from the £12 million reserved from the waiting list fund to finance the recommendations of Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy in 1990-91

District and specialty list	*Fund allocated £*
Aylesbury	
Plastic surgery	35,000
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	
General surgery	167,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	120,000
ENT	51,000
Oral surgery	100,000
Basildon and Thurrock	
General surgery	500,000
Plastic surgery	50,000
Bath	
Trauma and orthopaedics	283,000
Bloomsbury	
Trauma and orthopaedics	267,000
ENT	212,000
Plastic surgery	43,000
Bolton	
General surgery	156,000
Bradford	
ENT	86,000
Plastic surgery	95,000
Brighton	

District and specialty list	Fund allocated £
Trauma and orthopaedics	200,000
Bristol and Weston	
General surgery	242,000
Central Manchester	
Ophthalmology	29,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	125,000
City and Hackney	
ENT	34,000
Dartford and Gravesham	
ENT	37,000
Dudley	
Plastic surgery	179,000
Durham	
General surgery	56,000
East Berkshire	
Plastic surgery	59,000
East Cumbria	
General surgery	121,000
East Suffolk	
Trauma and orthopaedics	260,000
Greenwich	
General surgery	111,000
Hastings	
Trauma and orthopaedics	250,000
Hillingdon	
Trauma and orthopaedics	160,000
Hounslow	
ENT	48,000
Hull	
Urology	106,000
ENT	50,000
Kettering	
General surgery	219,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	488,000
Kingston and Esher	
Ophthalmology	396,000
Leicestershire	
Plastic surgery	134,000
Lewisham and North Southwark	
General surgery	375,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	200,000
ENT	16,000
Medway	
General surgery	17,000
Mid Downs	
General surgery	102,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	174,000
Newcastle	
Plastic surgery	143,000
North Devon	
General surgery	60,000
North East Essex	
General surgery	250,000
North Staffordshire	
General surgery	50,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	410,000
Gynaecology	50,000
North Warwickshire	
Plastic surgery	160,000
North West Surrey	
Trauma and orthopaedics	218,000
Norwich	
General surgery	55,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	266,000
Plastic surgery	89,000
Nottingham	
Plastic surgery	142,000
Oldham	
General surgery	216,000
Preston	
Plastic surgery	12,000
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	
Plastic surgery	255,000
Salisbury	
Plastic surgery	288,000
Sheffield	
Trauma and orthopaedics	492,000
Shropshire	
General surgery	382,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	350,000
Somerset	
Trauma and orthopaedics	114,000
Southampton	
Trauma and orthopaedics	211,000
South Manchester	
Plastic surgery	200,000
Tower Hamlets	
Trauma and orthopaedics	25,000
Oral surgery	25,000
Waltham Forest	
ENT	82,000
West Essex	
General surgery	32,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	221,000
West Lancashire	
Trauma and orthopaedics	294,000
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	
General surgery	50,000
Trauma and orthopaedics	100,000
Ophthalmology	143,000
Winchester	
Trauma and orthopaedics	179,000

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he proposes to produce a detailed report on the expenditures from the waiting list initiative showing each project approved, together with its outcome.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We do not intend to publish a detailed report on all the projects which have received funding under the waiting time initiative. Allocations from

the waiting list fund are made to regional health authorities (RHAs) which use the funds in a variety of ways, with the common objective of reducing the number of patients who wait over one year for hospital treatment. Allocations to RHAs for 1990-91 are shown in the table. In the first half of that year, the total number of patients waiting over one year fell by 2½ per cent. and the number waiting over two years fell by 12 per cent. Provisional figures indicate a further fall in the five months to February 1991 of 12 per cent. in the number waiting over one year and 21 per cent. in the number waiting over two years.

Waiting list fund—allocations to regions

	1990-91[1] *(£ million)*
Northern	1·798
Yorkshire	2·017
Trent	2·923
East Anglian	1·135
North West Thames	1·690
North East Thames	3·808
South East Thames	2·738
South West Thames	2·138
Wessex	2·024
Oxford	1·638
South Western	1·546
West Midlands	4·472
Mersey	1·515
North Western	2·860
SHAs	0·200
Total	£33 million

[1] Includes allocations from the £12 million set aside for the 100 longest specialty waiting lists in the country.

Auditing of Accounts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who has the responsibility for the audit of national health service self-governing trusts and general practitioner fundholders accounts; and whether these accounts will be available to hon. Members.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Audit Commission has the responsibility for appointing the auditors of the accounts of general practitioner fundholders. A summary of these accounts is included in family health services authority's accounts which are submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. There has never been a requirement that these should be published and we do not propose to introduce such a change.

The Audit Commission is also responsible for appointing the auditors of the accounts of national health service trusts. NHS trusts are required to present their annual reports, audited accounts and any report on those accounts made by the auditor at a public meeting which the trust is required to hold in every calendar year except the year in which it becomes operational. These reports will also be available to hon. Members.

Anti-cancer Drugs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost per head of population in 1990 in each standard health region of general practitioner prescribed anti-cancer drugs such as boplatin and interleukin; and what were the hospital allocations of such drugs in each national health service health region in 1990-91.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not held centrally on the hospital allocations of such drugs. Information on the cost of general practitioner prescribed anti-cancer drugs could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given to purchasing authorities about making provision for the cost of anti-cancer drugs in placing contracts; and what agency is responsible for monitoring the results of any such guidance.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance about contracts has not been given to purchasing authorities in that level of detail.

Child Cancer

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conclusions he has reached, and what research is being undertaken, on the possibility of links between water supply from ground and river sources and the increased incidence of child cancer.

Mr. Dorrell: The numerous published studies of cancer rates in relation to the type of source of drinking water do not point to an association for childhood cancers.

The Department is not aware of any current or proposed research in the United Kingdom on this hypothesis.

Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the recommendations of Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy with regard to the Newcastle plastic surgery waiting list have been acted on; with what result; and at what cost.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As recommended by Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy (IACC), Newcastle district health authority employed a locum consultant in plastic surgery for nine months in 1990-91 to undertake additional in-patient, day case and out-patient sessions. This scheme received an allocation of £143,000 from the £12 million reserved for problem lists from the waiting list fund. The district has met the requirements of its contract with IACC. Between April 1990 and March 1991 it reduced the numbers waiting over a year for in-patient and day case plastic surgery by 565 and has treated an additional 422 in-patients and day cases, and 400 out-patients.

Health Authorities (Discharge Procedures)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will arrange for the reports of health authorities on their discharge procedures as per HC(89)5 together with the subsequent comments and action of regional health authorities and his own Department to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell: Information about action taken by district health authorities is not available centrally, since they were asked to report to their regional health authorities. Action by special health authorities is being followed up through the quality control and business planning process. Business plans will be published in due course.

Work-related Health Problems

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of health authorities who have staff in post specifically to advise, instruct and inform on preventable work-related health problems such as repetitive strain injury; what guidance his Department offers health authorities on this point; and what steps he is taking to review the results of the guidance he has given.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Each health authority is responsible for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of its employees at work and will be guided by particular advice issued by the Health and Safety Executive. The Department has issued guidance on the establishment of occupational health services generally, but does not collect information on the number of health authority staff deployed on such services.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases of breaches of the Abortion Act 1967 and regulations relating to abortion his Department has referred the cases to the legal authorities in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many forms relating to abortion were submitted late by King's College hospital, London, in relation to the regulations governing abortion in the last 12 months.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not the Department's practice to disclose detailed information relating to terminations of pregnancy carried out at individual places.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action his Department takes in relation to forms concerning abortion submitted to the chief medical officer without being dated or signed by the doctors concerned; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action his Department takes in relation to forms concerning abortion submitted to the chief medical officer which breach the regulations concerning the notification of abortions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All of the notification forms sent to the chief medical officer are scrutinised by staff authorised by him. Any incomplete forms are returned to the notifying doctor for completion and breaches of the regulations are taken up as appropriate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to review its 1978 report on the supply of national newspapers and periodicals (Cmnd. 7214).

Mr. Redwood: The Director General of Fair Trading is currently conducting a review of a number of issues concerning the distribution of newspapers and periodicals. The director general will decide in the light of this review whether further action under the competition legislation for which he is responsible is required. It would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of the completion of the director general's review.

Policy Holders Protection Board

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the current members of the Policy Holders Protection Board and give the relevant experience of each member; how many of the commission are women; and what percentage of the total membership they comprise.

Mr. Redwood: The Policyholders Protection Act 1975 provides that the Policyholders Protection Board comprises five members. The Act requires that at least three members shall be directors, chief executives or managers of authorised insurance companies and at least one member shall be qualified to represent the interests of policyholders. The information requested on the current members of the board is as follows:

Colin North Smith CBE (Chairman)
Former senior partner in Peat Marwick McLintock and former chairman of the insurance sub-committee of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

Anthony Brend
Chief executive of Commercial Union Assurance Company.

Charles O'Brien
Director of the M & G Assurance Group. Former general manager and actuary of the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses and currently a member of its council. President of the Institute of Actuaries 1976-78.

Nigel Proddow
Former director and chief general manager of Pearl Assurance plc.

Rosemary McRobert OBE
Currently a director of the investors compensation scheme. Former deputy director of the Consumers Association and director of the Retail Trading Standards Association.

Women comprise 20 per cent. of the board's membership.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: The total sums paid out by my Department in fees to outside organisations in furtherance of privatisation since 1979 are shown below. As far as possible, the sums paid have been broken down by year, and between fees and commissions.

The costs of current privatisations, including fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sale is completed.

Year	Fees £ million	Commissions £ million
1981-82	2·6	3·0
1984-85	74·6	94·4
1985-86	[1]10·6	—
1986-87	[1]7·9	—
1987-88	[1]37·0	—
1988-89	24·6	22·9
1989-90	1·7	0·1
1990-91	[1]0·1	—

[1] Includes commissions, if any.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 13 March 1990, at column 172. Expenditure in the past two years was as follows:

	£000
1989-90	2,287
[1]1990-91	2,297

[1]Estimated.

The figures include regional press officer and other support services. Activity in this area during the current year is expected to remain at broadly the same level as in 1990-91.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the objectives of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I am publishing revised objectives of my Department. They are as follows:

The aim of the Department of Trade and Industry is to foster a market environment which results in satisfied customers and prosperous producers.

To this end the DTI works to ensure that markets at home and abroad are open, fair and competitive; to see that UK business is best placed to take full advantage of market opportunities; and to champion all those involved in wealth creation.

The DTI will

- work for trade liberalisation worldwide, and the completion of the single European market;
- promote exports of UK goods and services;
- stimulate innovation in industry by encouraging research, the transfer of technologies, the spread of technical skills and closer links between business and the science base;
- improve the provision of information to business about new methods, opportunities and management skills;
- encourage competition by tackling restrictive practices, cartels and monopolies, and by extending privatisation and contracting out;
- foster the integrity of markets so that customers, creditors and investors benefit from a well targeted system of protection and a light but effective regulatory framework allowing informed choices to be made;
- encourage a positive attitude towards wealth creation;
- reduce burdens on business by simplifying regulation and scrutinising the compliance costs which regulation brings;
- listen to the concerns of business and consumers and ensure that these are taken into account in the development of Government policies;
- ensure that policies respond to the needs of different regions and areas with special difficulties.

In order to achieve these objectives, the DTI is committed to managing and developing the people who work within it, to enable them to provide a professional, high quality, accessible and responsive service to business and the community.

Development Management

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review the work done by the United Nations centre on transnational corporations in regard to the establishment of criteria for sustainable development management.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* The Government have kept the centre's work on criteria for sustainable development management under close review and will continue to do so.

Matrix Churchill

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the grades and official responsibilities at that time of the officials of his Department who visited the offices of Matrix Churchill in Coventry at 11.15 am on 24 April 1989, 3.51 pm on 11 September 1989, 3.10 pm on 27 October 1989, 9.35 am on 1 December 1989, 9.35 am on 26 March 1990, 9.35 am on 20 April 1990 and 1.17 pm on 26 April 1990.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* In the light of the fact that criminal proceedings have been instituted against three individuals, it would not be right to provide this information.

Stock Exchange Council of America

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has now taken all necessary action arising from the contents of the memorandum of understanding with the Stock Exchange Council of America, with particular reference to the evidence provided by Ivan Boesky.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* For reasons of international comity, the Secretary of State declines to comment on exchanges of information which may or may not have taken place between international regulators.

NORTHERN IRELAND

St. John Ambulance Brigade

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what facilities he has made available to staff in his Department to contribute to the appeal that has been launched for people with the name of John to help raise £5 million for the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Dr. Mawhinney: Prior to the tabling of this question, no request for assistance with the appeal had been received. There is scope for arrangements to be made to draw it to the attention of staff.

Environment

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the response of the Government to the Environment Select Committee's report on Northern Ireland environmental issues.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) on 26 March 1991, at column 366-68.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Northern Ireland Department of Education will take action to remedy the division of the South Eastern education and library board into four different locations in the city of Belfast.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department of Education for Northern Ireland is considering proposals by the board for a single site headquarters and has sought clarification on some aspects of the proposals.

Building Work

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list the number and location of all new buildings or extensions commissioned by his Department in each of the past five years which *(a)* had contracts worth between £3 million and £5 million and *(b)* had contracts worth more than £5 million.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Year	£3 to £5 million	Location	Over £5 million	Location
1986-87	—	—	1	Antrim
1987-88	2	Armagh Maze	2	Newry
1988-89	9	Antrim Dungannon Greater Belfast Londonderry Omagh Warrenpoint	[1]4	Banbridge Newtownards
1989-90	[1]8	Ballyclare Belfast Hillsborough Londonderry	[1]3	Antrim Belfast
1990-91	6	Belfast Dromore Enniskillen Larne Limavady Londonderry	[1]6	Bangor Belfast Carrickfergus Londonderry

[1] These figures include building and accommodation needs of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and a civil defence centre. The locations of the buildings have not been divulged for security reasons.

Housing, Newry

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of any improvement or renovation schemes scheduled to be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive at properties in North street, Newry, over the next three years.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I have been advised by the chief executive that no improvement/renovation works are proposed for North street, Newry, within the next three years.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what improvement or renovation schemes have been carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to properties at North street, Newry, in each of the past five years; and what was the cost of each scheme.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I have been advised by the chief executive that two improvements/renovation schemes were carried out in North street, Newry, during the past five years. They are as follows:

1. North street phase 1

Improvement scheme (103 dwellings). Completed in February 1986 at a cost of £408,800, which comprised of the following works:

(a) fire regulation compliance
(b) upgrading of entrance hall and access galleries
(c) provision of audio/visual entry system.

2. North street phase 2

Improvement scheme 2

Improvement scheme (18 dwellings). Completed in February 1987 at a cost of £129,337, which comprised the following works:

(a) fire regulation compliance
(b) upgrading of entrance hall and accesses
(c) provision of audio/visual entry system
(d) general repairs including kitchen fittings
(e) re-roofing
(f) re-wiring and installation of Economy 7.

Local Government Finance

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what changes will occur in Northern Ireland's rates arising from the new Government proposals for local government financing in Great Britain;

(2) if he will make a statement on local government finances in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The application in Northern Ireland of the reduction announced in the Budget is a good outcome for the Province's domestic ratepayers. They will contribute, on average, 36 per cent. less towards the cost of local authority-type services, which is in line with the switch to contral funding of 36 per cent. of the amount charge payers contribute to local authority expenditure in Great Britain.

The Government's review of the community charge did not extend to Northern Ireland, which has different arrangements for financing local government services and continues to operate a rates system. Some 90 per cent. of expenditure on these services is administered by central Government in Northern Ireland, to which the ratepayers contribute through the regional rate, while district rates contribute towards the remaining 10 per cent. of services which the district councils administer. Rate relevent expenditure on the services administered by Northern Ireland departments or their agencies, to which the regional rate contributes, is determined through the public expenditure survey system and as such is subject to the full scrutiny of Parliament. This expenditure is supported by central Government at a rate of 81 per cent. which indicates the Government's continued commitment to tackling the high level of need in the Province.

Ministers in Northern Ireland will, however, be examining the proposals in the recent Green Paper and will consider any implications they may have for Northern Ireland.

Expenditure in Schools

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing the expenditure per pupil on (i) books and (ii) equipment in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in cash and real terms since 1976.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* Total expenditure on books and equipment is as follows—separate figures not available. Figures are not available prior to the 1978-79 financial year.

	Primary schools		*Secondary schools*	
	Cash £	*Real terms* £	*Cash* £	*Real terms* £
1978-79	10·40	24·33	22·88	53·53
1979-80	12·05	24·15	25·24	50·58
1980-81	12·34	20·89	25·73	43·56
1981-82	14·37	22·19	29·22	45·12
1982-83	14·63	21·09	30·62	44·14
1983-84	15·08	20·76	31·74	43·69
1984-85	16·37	21·45	34·26	44·89
1985-86	17·14	21·25	36·40	45·13
1986-87	18·30	22·01	42·14	50·68
1987-88	19·94	22·74	47·92	54·66
1988-89	20·00	21·26	46·55	49·48
1989-90	27·74	27·74	54·26	54·26
1990-91[1]	—	—	—	—

[1] Figures not yet available.

PRIME MINISTER

Prisoners (Visits)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister if he will co-ordinate policy on the allocation of prisoners so that persons convicted in either England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland may serve their sentences at a convenient establishment for regular visits from their families.

The Prime Minister: The allocation of prisoners in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the respective prison authorities. Nearness to home is one of the factors which is taken into account, along with other matters, in deciding a prisoner's allocation. There is provision in the Criminal Justice Act 1961 for the transfer of prisoners between United Kingdom jurisdictions.

Engagements

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 30 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Prime Minister's office on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

The Prime Minister: My office has incurred no expenditure on advertising or promotional material, and there are no plans for any such expenditure in 1991-92.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Cabinet Office on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Office has not incurred and does not expect to incur any expenditure on promotional advertising on television, radio or in newspapers in the years 1979-92.

Information on other promotional material is not available for the years 1979 to 1987. Expenditure on such material from 1987-88 was:

	£
1987-88	19,306
1988-89	9,500
1989-90	14,833

The estimate for 1990-91 is £1,000.

The Cabinet Office does not expect to incur any expenditure on other promotional material in 1991-92.

Matrix Churchill

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will name the Government Department to which a Crown servant calling himself Balson and visiting the offices of Matrix Churchill in Coventry at 11.15 am on 24 April 1989, 3.51 pm on 11 September 1989, 3.10 pm on 27 October 1989, 9.35 am on 1 December 1989, 9.35 am on 26 March 1990, 9.35 am on 20 April 1990 and 1.17 pm on 26 April 1990 was attached between 1 April 1989 and 30 April 1990; what was his grade; and what were his official responsibilities.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and industry.

Arms Trade

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister which proposals he has to allow international advance warning of arms' build-up by a particular country.

The Prime Minister *[holding reply 29 April 1991]:* On 8 April I proposed the establishment of a United Nations register of arms sales to enable the international community to monitor and control any excessive build-up of arms by a particular country. The proposal was endorsed by our European partners. We are now pursuing it in discussions with the other permanent members of the Security Council and the United Nations secretariat.

ENVIRONMENT

Immingham Port Development

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what protection is intended for communities living near, or en route to, power stations in the east midlands who will be adversley effected by coal lorry traffic resulting from the use of the new port development at Immingham.

Mr. Baldry: I am advised that the Secretary of State for Transport has no proposals to improve the trunk road network or to carry out other measures as a consequence of the Immingham lorry traffic. However, he intends to keep the situation under review.

Community Charge

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in his consideration of the relative weight to be given to people and to property in his replacement of the community charge, (1) he will make it his policy to avoid creating a deterrent to home improvement if rental values are to be used;

(2) he will make it his policy *(a)* to avoid unfairness due to changes in capital values which are caused by factors extraneous to the property itself and *(b)* to avoid subjective and variable valuation procedures;

(3) he will make it his policy to identify property values in the taxes paid by tenants of councils and housing associations;

(4) he will make it his policy that *(a)* residents in areas served by inefficient councils should pay more than those being served by efficient councils, *(b)* that the principle of local accountability is maintained and *(c)* that local taxes paid should reflect the services used;

(5) he will make it his policy to distinguish between nominal property values and the ability to pay.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 April our proposals for the new council tax. The proposal is to place each property in one of the seven bands by value.

There will be no need either for precise valuations or for regular general revaluations. Paragraph 2.30 of the consultation paper explains that

"because the tax is to be based on broad bands improvements to a property would not necessarily lead to a change in its appropriate band. One option would be to take alterations into account only when a property changed hands".

The highest band property will pay about two and a half times as much as the lowest in an area. Each household will receive a single bill on the assumption that it consists of two people. There will be a 25 per cent. discount for one-adult households. The level of council tax will be higher than the standard level where an authority spends more than is necessary to provide a standard level of service, and lower in more efficient authorities. People on low incomes will receive rebates of up to 100 per cent. of the council tax.

Tombs

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to amend or vary the appropriate regulations on conservation areas to prevent the demolition of tombs which are less than 115 cu m in size and which have an important historical interest.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has no plans to amend the direction in paragraph 97 of circular 8/87 which exempts from conservation area controls any building with a total cubic content not exceeding 115 cu m.

If a building in a conservation area smaller than 115 cu m is of sufficient architectural or historic interest it can be listed and will then be subject to the more extensive listed building controls.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in favour of establishing an environmental protection agency for the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has received from a variety of sources proposals for the creation of environmental protection agencies of various kinds. The Government's views on the institutions required for environmental protection were set out in chapter 18 of the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm. 1200) published in September 1990.

Litter

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the names of the officers appointed by each local authority in England with responsibility for issuing £10 fixed penalty fines for dropping litter under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the number of such notices issued since 13 February.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not held by my Department. However, I understand that a number of local authorities, including Bath, Darlington, Chorley and Warrington councils, have made use of the power under section 88 of the Act and have adopted the fixed penalty scheme in their areas.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what percentage poll tax collection rate the reduction of £140 in respect of each poll tax payer in Lambeth will be paid.

Mr. Key: Entitlement to community charge grant, which will compensate authorities for the income from community charges forgone under the Community Charges (General Reduction Act) 1991, will be based on the rate of charge collection actually achieved by each authority in 1991-92; except that, where the charge is reduced to zero as a result of the Act, entitlement will be based on the authority's original estimate of its rate of collection, disregarding the effect of the Act.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the sums added to or subtracted from Grimsby's standard spending assessment under his new system of resource allocation under his new system of local government finance.

Mr. Key: The consultation paper about the proposed new council tax issued on 23 April states that the Government do not propose any major changes to standard spending assessments.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out those local authorities which have been rate-capped or charge-capped during each of the years in which the capping system has operated.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* Listed in the table are those authorities which were selected for rate limitation in each of the years between 1985-86 and 1989-90, and for community charge limitation in 1990-91

and 1991-92. In addition for 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89, the three years following abolition of the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council, the Local Government Act 1985 designated for precept limitation the Inner London education authority, the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, the Northumbria police authority, the metropolitan county police authorities, the metropolitan county fire and civil defence authorities, and the metropolitan county passenger transport authorities.

Authorities designated for selective rate limitation.

1985-86

Basildon	Lambeth
Brent	Leicester
Camden	Lewisham
Greenwich	Merseyside
GLC	Portsmouth
Hackney	Sheffield
Haringey	South Yorkshire
ILEA	Southwark
Islington	Thamesdown

1986-87

Basildon	Lambeth
Camden	Lewisham
Greenwich	Liverpool
Hackney	Newcastle upon Tyne
Haringey	Southwark
Islington	Thamesdown

1987-88

Basildon	Lambeth
Brent	Lewisham
Brighton	Middlebrough
Camden	Newcastle upon Tyne
Gateshead	Newham
Greenwich	North Tyneside
Hackney	Sheffield
Haringey	Southwark
Hounslow	Thamesdown
Islington	Tower Hamlets

1988-89

Basildon	Liverpool
Camden	Manchester
Ealing	Middlesbrough
Greenwich	Newcastle upon Tyne
Hackney	Southwark
Haringey	Thamesdown
Kingston upon Hull	Tower Hamlets
Lambeth	Waltham Forest
Lewisham	

1989-90

Camden	Southwark
Greewich	Thamesdown
Hackney	Tower Hamlets
Lewisham	ILEA

Authorities designated for community charge limitation

1990-91

Avon	Haringey
Barnsley	Hillingdon
Basildon	Islington
Brent	Lambeth
Bristol	North Tyneside
Calderdale	Rochdale
Camden	Rotherham
Derbyshire	St. Helens
Doncaster	Southwark
Greewich	Wigan
Hammersmith and Fulham	

1991-92

Basildon	Milton Keynes
Bristol	Norwich
Greenwich	Reading
Ipswich	Somerset
Lambeth	Stoke-on-Trent
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	Warwickshire
Middlesbrough	Wirral

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate *(a)* the cost of establishing and maintaining community charge registers in the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 and *(b)* the cost of central Government publicity and information, including staff costs, to promote and support the establishment and maintenance of community charge registers in the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Key: The costs of establishing and maintaining community charge registers are not separately identifiable. The Government have not undertaken specific publicity on the establishment and maintenance of community charge registers. We have, however, produced a series of community charge practice notes, jointly with the local authority associations. Practice note No. 3 dealt with compiling the community charge register; No. 8 dealt with the canvass; No. 9 dealt with sole or main residence; and No. 24 dealt with maintaining the community charges register. We estimate that the total cost of printing these practice notes was £17,400. Copies were placed in the Library.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate *(a)* the direct cost to local authorities of collection, and the enforcement of collection, of the community charge in 1990-91, *(b)* the indirect cost to local authorities of loss of cash flow arising from delays in payment of the community charge in 1990-91 and *(c)* the payments shortfall and the national non-collection rate of the community charge in its first year of operation in England.

Mr. Key: English local authorities budgeted to spend £440 million on the collection of community charges in 1990-91. Estimates of the cost resulting from delays in collection cannot be made from the information collected from authorities; and information on arrears and bad debts at 31 March 1991 is not yet available.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost of community charge transitional relief in 1990-91 *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each standard region.

Mr. Key: We shall be in a position to publish a final figure for the amount of relief given in 1990-91 when local authorities submit their final grant claims later this year. The total amount of relief grant claimed by authorities in their initial claims for 1990-91 is £259,881,592. The amount for each region in England is as follows.

	£
North West	47,854,631
North	22,451,448
Yorkshire and Humberside	36,023,883
West Midlands	21,353,472
East Midlands	26,830,977
East Anglia	11,137,309
South East	68,733,298
South West	25,496,574

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the cost of re-billing the community charge for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: My Department is discussing with the local authority associations what additional administrative costs local authorities are incurring as a result of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act and of the accompanying changes in the community charge reduction scheme, and how these should be reimbursed. Our preliminary estimate is that these costs will be in the range of £50 to £60 million in England.

Local Government Officials

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will tabulate in league order the top 10 highest paid officials in local government stating the employing authority in each case, and the amount of each salary.

Mr. Key: This information is not collected by my Department.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 April, *Official Report*, Volume 189, column *492*.

Government Buildings

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future use of Norfolk house, East Kilbride.

Mr. Yeo: The future of Norfolk house will depend on the outcome of tripartite negotiations currently in progress between the Department as tenant, the Department's landlord, East Kilbride development corporation, and the head landlord, the Norwich Union Insurance Group. These negotiations aim to establish agreement on the complex issue of legal liability for the defects which have made Norfolk house unusable.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those Government properties, owned, leased or rented, which are currently subject to structural investigation.

Mr. Yeo: A wide range of structural investigations are taking place at any given time, varying from cases where options from repair to renewal are explicitly under consideration through full-scale inspections prior to lease renewals and down to routine inspections to anticipate problems and establish future maintenance requirements. In addition, responsibility for maintenance of Government property lies with a wide range of Government Departments. It is not therefore practicable to provide the information in the form requested.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the structural investigation currently being undertaken into Centre 1, East Kilbride.

Mr. Yeo: Investigations have shown that Centre 1 requires considerable repair and refurbishment. My Department has appointed Hugh Martin Partnership, assisted by the Property Services Agency, to compare the long-run value for money of effecting the necessary remedial work with the alternative of developing a new building elsewhere in East Kilbride.

Gulf Coral Atolls

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many experts work for his Department on the protection of fragile coral atolls in the northern Gulf; what contact he has had with Dr. Nigel Downing, formerly of the Kuwaiti scientific service, on the damage to fish larvae; and how many civilians working on the ecological consequences of the Gulf war have been flown to Kuwait at Her Majesty's Government's expense.

Mr. Baldry: The protection of coral atolls in the northern Gulf lies outside the direct responsibilities of my Department. On the action that we have taken to pass Dr. Downing's concerns to the Government of Kuwait, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 21 March 1991, *Official Report*, Vol. 188, column *171*. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the transport cost of a team of three officials of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who flew to the Gulf in response to a specific request from the Government of Saudi Arabia.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 29 April 1991]*: The numbers and grades of staff and complement in the statistical divisions[1] of DOE (Central) are set out in the table.

[1] The statistical divisions in DOE (Central) comprise housing data statistics, finance local authority statistics, land and general statistics, environmental protection statistics, and construction industry statistics.

There are also statisticians employed throughout the Department in posts of a largely administrative nature: these numbered 10 at 1 April 1991.

We do not have readily available historical data for each year back to 1 April 1979, but I have provided staff in post data for various dates within the 1979-80 to 1991-92 period in my replies to questions dated 21 July 1988, 13 March 1989 and 6 March 1990.

	Staff in post at 1 April 1991		*Complement 1 April 1991*	
	Statistical	*Administrative*	*Statistical*	*Administrative*
Grade 5/Chief Statistician	5		5	
Grade 6	1	1	1	1
Grade 7/Statistician	22	4	22	3

	Staff in post at 1 April 1991		Complement 1 April 1991	
	Statistical	Administrative	Statistical	Administrative
SEO	—	4	—	4
HEO/Senior Assistant Statistician	3	12	3	16
EO/Assistant Statistician	4	32	4	32
AO	—	36	—	33·5
AA	—	12	—	13
Sub Total	35	101	35	102·5
Total	136		137·5	

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that extra aid will be provided for St. Helena to cover the whole costs of the current drugs case on the island.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Financial provision has been made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for all the costs of this case.

Cartagena Convention

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom Government or its representative will be supporting the listing of sea turtles on annex II of the protocol as proposed by the ad hoc meeting of experts for the development of annexes in November 1990 concerning specially protected areas and wildlife under the convention for the protection and development of the marine environment of the wider Caribbean region, Cartagena convention.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are considering the implications for the dependent territories of all the proposed listings on the annexes of the protocol concerning specially protected areas and wildlife under the Cartagena convention.

Correspondence Unit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the volume of correspondence (i) coming in and (ii) being sent out by the Members of Parliament's correspondence unit of the Foreign Office for each month in 1990.

Mr. Garel-Jones: It is not possible to put a figure to the volume of all correspondence addressed to the Secretary of State and Ministers of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. However, 14,275 letters were received from Members of Parliament in 1990. It is our policy to reply to all such letters.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following is the reply:

Total expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on press and public relations from 1983-84 to 1989-90, latest estimates for 1990-91 and budget provisions for 1991-92 (£ million)

	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Payments to Central Office of Information for overseas information material and related activities	17·4	18·8	18·3	18·7	19·2	18·3	18·1	15·7	11·9
Other information services	0·9	0·8	0·9	0·7	0·9	0·9	3·3	5·8	5·5
Running costs of Diplomatic Wing Information/News Department	1·8	1·4	1·9	1·9	2·0	1·8	2·4	3·6	5·0
Running costs of ODA Wing Information Department	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·2	0·2	0·3	0·4	0·4	0·4
Costs of information staff at overseas posts	12·4	12·8	13·6	14·6	17·6	17·5	18·8	20·2	21·6
Total	32·8	34·1	35·0	36·1	39·9	38·8	43·0	45·7	44·4

Figures for the period before 1983-84 are not available on a comparable basis.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such fees have been paid for the period in question and there is no expenditure planned.

Prince Ranariddh Cambodia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Ministers and officials of his Department who met Prince Ranariddh of Cambodia during his recent visit; and what was discussed.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My noble Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, supported by officials of the South-East Asian department of the

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, met Prince Ranariddh on 24 April to discuss the Cambodian peace process and related matters.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Lord Chancellor's Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: The figures for the Lord Chancellor's Department, excluding staff costs, are as follows:

	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	[1] *1991-92* £
Television advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Radio advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Newspaper advertising	15,000	3,967	50,242	5,975
Other promotional material	32,500	31,208	77,968	82,000

[1] Forecast.

The breakdown of the amounts spent on respective areas and the amounts spent for the previous years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but the total expenditure, including staff costs, was:

	£
1984-85	135,730
1985-86	176,613
1986-87	148,020
1987-88	137,001

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Budgets

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list those London education authorities which have delegated the whole of their school budgets;

(2) if he will list those London education authorities which have delegated the budget for educational psychological services.

Mr. Fallon: No local education authority has delegated all its potential schools budget to schools. Nor has any local education authority delegated all the budget for education psychology services.

The proportions of their potential schools budgets which local education authorities are delegating to schools are listed in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on 21 February, *Official Report*, columns *235-36*, together with the pursuant reply of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *236*.

Education, Eltham

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many reports by Her Majesty's inspectors have been produced on education in Eltham during the past 10 years; and what arrangements have been made for these reports to be seen by the public.

Mr. Eggar: Since 1983, when reports were first published, Her Majesty's inspectorate has produced four reports on education provided for the constituents of Eltham. All four reports were published. Three were institutional inspection reports and one was a survey report on science education in years one to three of some secondary schools in Greenwich.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Eggar: The expenditure figures for press and public relations by this Department for the financial year 1984-85 to 1990-91 are provided in the table. Figures for 1979 to 1983-84 are not available on a comparable basis. The 1990-91 figure is provisional. The 1991-92 estimate is £2,778·0.

Year	*£000s*
1984-85	788·8
1985-86	1,026·3
1986-87	1,937·8
1987-88	2,313·6
1988-89	2,336·2
1989-90	2,596·0
1990-91	2,281·5

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Eggar: In the privatisation of the National Seed Development Organisation Ltd. and assets of the Plant Breeding Institute, the fees and other sale expenses in 1987-88 totalled about £0·6 million as stated in the published appropriation account for class XII, vote 13. In 1986 fees amounted to only £48,000, as stated in the published appropriation account for class XII, vote 4 for 1986-87. This is the only privatisation conducted by this Department in the period referred to.

Disability and Equal Opportunities

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he has given to the document "Guidelines on Disability and Equal Opportunities Issues" drawn up by a working party including disabled teachers and published by the National Union of Teachers; if there is any action he has taken or will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend understands that the National Union of Teachers will be writing to him about the recommendations in its document, "Guidelines on Disability".

Southwark

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the cost to public funds to date of Bacon's city technology college, Southwark, in each of the financial years since its announcement; what is the latest projected cost up to and including completion; and what proportion of capital moneys expended by his Department in *(a)* Southwark and *(b)* the parliamentary constituency of Southwark and Bermondsey on (i) secondary schools, (ii) all schools and (iii) in total this comprises in each of the years in question.

Mr. Eggar: Capital expenditure by the Department on the Bacon's city technology college was £1·799 million in 1989-90 and £5·671 million in 1990-91. The building programme is expected to conclude in 1991-92 and the forecast spend is £3·956 million. Information on capital expenditure by the London borough of Southwark since it took over educational responsibilities from ILEA is not yet available. Southwark local education authority's annual capital guideline for 1991-92 was £1·258 million, of which the notional schools' component was £1·220 million. The comparable figures for 1990-91 were £1·429 million, £1·367 million of which was for schools. Southwark's allocation for capital works at voluntary aided schools in 1991-92 was £0·861 million and in 1990-91 was £1·186 million.

Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what rating the Newcastle upon Tyne polytechnic has been given by Her Majesty's inspectors as regards quality of provision of teaching; and whether he has had any discussions with the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council as to how this will be reflected in its funding decisions.

Mr. Alan Howarth: HMI offers advice to the PCFC programme advisory groups on subject areas, not whole institutions. That advice is used by PCFC in judging claims made for outstanding quality by institutions in their bids for funds. The PCFC programme advisory group accepted Newcastle polytechnic's claims for outstanding quality in six of the nine PCFC programme areas. HMI judgments, subject by subject, are always made known to the institution.

My right hon. and learned Friend has not had discussions of how these gradings for Newcastle polytechnic will be reflected in its funding decisions. He would not regard it as appropriate to do so and he is satisfied with the arrangements adopted by PCFC to reward outstanding quality.

Free School Meals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the cost in the financial year 1991-92 of restoring entitlement to free school meals to *(a)* the children of parents on family credit and *(b)* all others who lost entitlement to free school meals as a result of the Social Security Act 1986, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fallon: It is not possible to estimate the cost of reintroducing the wide variety of discretionary schemes which existed prior to the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pension Fund Surpluses

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider reviewing the permissibility of the practice of companies capitalising on pension fund surpluses to obtain higher rating and funding.

Mr. Maples: I have no plans to review accounting treatment for pension fund surpluses as set out in the Companies act 1985 and statement of standard accounting practice (SSAP) 24.

Tampons

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of zero-rating VAT on sanitary towels and tampons.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information is not available on which to base an estimate.

Accident Prevention Equipment

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of loss of revenue if items of home safety equipment were all sold at zero VAT.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information is not available on which to base an estimate.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Central Office of Information on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotion material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Figures for the Central Office of Information on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material for the years 1979-80 to 1985-86 were given in the answer at columns *240-42* on 25 November 1986. Figures for the years 1986-87 to 1988-89 were given in the answer at columns *167-68* on 13 March 1990. Figures for the years 1989-90 and 1990-91 are listed in the table below:

	1989-90 £000s	[1] *1990-91* £000s
Television advertising	45,460	48,100
Radio advertising	2,770	1,800
Press advertising	40,880	39,800
Other promotional material	33,000	33,700

[1] Estimate

Detailed decisions on estimated expenditure on advertising through the Central Office of Information on behalf of other Government Departments for 1991-92 are for departmental Ministers.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by the Treasury in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: The total sums paid by Her Majesty's Treasury in fees and commissions to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation since 1979-80 is shown in the table. Where the split between fees and commissions is known this has been shown.

The costs of the forthcoming secondary sale of BT shares, including total fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sale is completed.

Year	*Fees £ million*	*Commissions £ million*	*Total £ million*
1979-80	n/a	n/a	4
1980-81	0	0	0
1981-82	n/a	n/a	7
1982-83	0	0	0
1983-84	n/a	n/a	23
1984-85	n/a	n/a	2
1985-86	18	17	35
1986-87	0	0	0
1987-88	79	40	119
1988-89	2	0	2
1989-90	1	0	1
1990-91	[1]	0	[1]

[1] Negligible.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by the Treasury on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Her Majesty's Treasury press and public relations expenditure is as follows:

	£
1988-89	548,264
1989-90	564,691
1990-91	510,489
1991-92	[1]560,989

[1] Estimate.

Comparable figures on press and public relations from 1979-80 to 1987-88 are unavailable and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Top Rate Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate for the total number of top rate taxpayers after the Budget changes in 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: About 1·7 million taxpayers are estimated to be liable to pay tax at the higher rate in 1991-92.

VAT

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1991-92 the additional revenue that would be generated by an increase of 5 per cent. in the rate of value added tax levied on those products which were historically subject to a 25 per cent. purchase tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Around £2·5 billion in a full year.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total burden to commerce and industry of re-programming computers, reprinting brochures, changing notices and other indirect costs arising from the change in the rate of value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is accepted that the change in rate will involve some additional and unavoidable compliance costs for business, but there is no readily available means of estimating them. However, these one-off costs should be viewed against the impact of the Budget as a whole, which is to reduce the burden which the tax system imposes on business.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will give the average extra cost per person per year of the extra 2·5 per cent. VAT announced in the Budget to *(a)* people in the Glanford and Scunthorpe constituency and *(b)* the national average.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 29 April 1991]*: Information is not available that would permit us to estimate the extra cost per person in the Glanford and Scunthorpe constituency.

The extra yield in a full year of the VAT increase is £5·5 billion and the population is around 57 million—this suggests an average cost of £96 per person.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of individuals in 1991-92 claiming *(a)* the additional personal allowance and *(b)* the widow's bereavement allowance.

Mr. Maude: In 1991-92 the number of individuals claiming the additional personal allowance is estimated to be 480,000. The corresponding figure for the widow's bereavement allowance is 130,000.

Earnings

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1991-92 the numbers of men and women with earnings below *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the national insurance contribution threshold.

Mr. Maude: Provisional estimates for 1991-92, based on projections from the 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys, are as follows:

	Women	*Men*
Numbers (millions) with earnings below		
Tax threshold	2·9	1·0
National insurance lower earnings limit	2·25	0·75

National Savings

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to change the aims of national savings.

Mr. Maples: Yes. I have decided that the following national savings aims should apply for 1991-92:

To attract personal saving as required by the Government's funding policy.

To encourage the saving habit among a wide range of people.

To give our customers a good, prompt and friendly service.

To market a range of products, with particular emphasis on encouraging longer-term saving.

Staff are to meet these aims within resource levels decided by Ministers and with the continuing objective of improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Coinage

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the new copper-coated steel 1p and 2p pieces to be introduced in 1992 will, if magnetised, affect the operation of credit cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The Royal Mint has advised that it is not aware of any such problems in countries that have been using low carbon mild steel issues.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Independent Radio News

Sir Robert McCrindle: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the provision made to accommodate Independent Radio News within the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* I understand IRN currently occupies space in No. 1 Bridge street, a building in the charge of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

DEFENCE

Air Defence Operations

16. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the grading of air electronic operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The decision to reduce the pay banding of master and flight sergeant air electronic operator with effect from 1 October 1989 has generated about 35 representations.

Downbanding was implemented after three job evaluations over a period of six years had shown it to be justified. In accordance with normal practice, no one suffered a cut in pay; personnel affected kept their existing pay rates on a mark-time basis.

Helicopters

18. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters of the British armed forces have been used in *(a)* the Gulf war and *(b)* assisting Kurdish refugees.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Some 100 British armed forces' helicopters were used in the Gulf war. On 30 April there were 12 RAF Chinook helicopters based in Turkey undertaking relief operations.

Peace Dividend

19. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimated saving arising out of the peace dividend.

Mr. Tom King: Since 1985, United Kingdom defence spending has reduced in real terms by over 10 per cent. —excluding the cost of the Gulf conflict. Figures for coming years are set out in the public expenditure White Paper.

NATO

20. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with other Defence Ministers regarding the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I am in regular contact with my alliance colleagues on a range of defence issues, including the future evolution of NATO in the light of the London declaration.

Army (Current Enlistment)

21. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many persons are currently enlisted in the Army; and how many of these are based *(a)* in Wales, *(b)* in the United Kingdom and *(c)* abroad.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As at 1 March, there were 131,643 other ranks enlisted in the Army. Of these, 973 were based in Wales, 70,047 in the rest of the United Kingdom and 60,623 abroad.

"Options for Change"

22. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete the "Options for Change" inquiry.

28. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish his revised "Options for Change" policy statement.

Mr. Tom King: As the hon. Member and my hon. Friend will be aware, we are continuing to study the proposals in "Options for Change" which I announced last July. When we are in a position to take decisions on the final size and shape of the armed forces, I shall of course report further to the House.

The Gulf

23. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current and future employment of British forces in the Gulf.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current level of United Kingdom deployment of armed services in the Gulf region.

Mr. Tom King: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the volunteer forces took part in the Gulf operation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 877 members of the volunteer forces were called out in support of British operations in the Gulf.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the speed of advance of the allied forces in the Gulf war has been assessed to have any strategic implications in the European theatre.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are considering the outcome of the campaign and the conclusions to be drawn from it, but it is too early to say how the results of this work might be made public.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was estimated to have been spent on the Gulf war by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 24 April 1991, at column *483*.

27. **Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a decision has yet been reached on the issuing of a campaign medal to those members of Her Majesty's forces who served in the war for the liberation of Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on 22 March, Her Majesty the Queen has approved the award of a medal for those who served in the Gulf. Further details about the medal will be announced in due course.

Territorial Army

24. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for strengthening the Territorial Army.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not possible to say what the future strength of the TA will be until the future size and shape of the Regular Army has been decided.

Unused Airfields

25. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many unused airfields are owned by his Department; what is the total acreage they cover; and what is his estimate of their value if sold on the open market.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The only unused airfield currently owned by the Ministry of Defence is RAF Bishopscourt in Northern Ireland, consisting of some 577 acres, which is currently being offered for sale on the open market. It is not our policy to disclose our estimate of the value of property in the process of disposal.

UN Forces

26. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to contribute United Kingdom troops to a United Nations force to protect refugees from Iraqi troops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We hope that the United Nations will take over the running of the camps for Kurdish refugees as soon as possible. Any requests from the United Nations for United Kingdom military assistance would be considered in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. No such request has yet been made.

Oilfield Fires (Kuwait)

29. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military or administrative assistance his Department is giving to those attempting to extinguish the Kuwaiti oilfield fires; and what military lessons his Department has drawn from this environmental disaster.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Assistance and advice has been provided on the disposal of unexploded ordnance by Royal Engineers personnel in Kuwait. In addition, the Royal Engineers have given safety briefings and have produced maps showing danger areas and leaflets giving safety advice. As for the lessons learnt, all aspects of the Gulf conflict are currently being investigated.

Chieftain Tank

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the lessons of the Gulf conflict have now enabled him to decide on the most suitable replacement for Chieftain tanks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: We hope that a decision will not have to be delayed too long.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The only privatisation my Department has undertaken since 1979 was the sale of Royal Ordnance plc, following an open competition, to British Aerospace plc in April 1987. The fees paid out in respect of that privatisation amounted to £1·9 million for work carried out between 1 January 1985 and completion of the sale.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The earliest year for which figures are available is 1982-83. Figures for the period 1982-83 to 1989-90 are as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	5·1
1983-84	6·3
1984-85	6·8
1985-86	6·7
1986-87	7·3
1987-88	7·0
1988-89	7·1
1989-90	8·0

The estimated expenditure figure for 1990-91 is £8·2 million and for 1991-92 £9·2 million.

Figures for 1979-80, 1980-81 and 1981-82 are not available.

The figures provided include staff costs and expenditure on films, exhibitions, publications and equipment.

Nimrod (Airframes)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod airframes have been purchased; at what cost; and how many such airframes are in current active service.

Mr. Alan Clark: Forty-nine Nimrod airframes were purchased and 36 are in current active service. The original cost of these airframes is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate expense.

AWACS

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many AWACS aircraft have been ordered from the United States; and at what cost.

Mr. Alan Clark: Seven E-3D AWACS aircraft have been ordered from the United States at a cost of £990 million.

Al Yamamah Contract

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Al Yamamah contract with Saudi Arabia to be completed.

Mr. Alan Clark: The formal understandings between Her Majesty's Government and the Saudi Arabian Government specify no date for completion.

Military Training (Fatalities)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the practice when fatalities among military personnel occur during training, with respect to whether a coroner's court conducts the post mortem; and whether the arrangements differ for regular and territorial personnel, and for domestic and overseas exercises.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I assume that the question relates to coroners' inquests. Should a sudden, violent or unnatural death occur in England or Wales, the coroner for the area concerned is obliged to conduct an inquest in accordance with the Coroners Act 1988. This applies to all service personnel whether of the regular or reserve forces. Coroners are also obliged to investigate the sudden or unnatural death of a person abroad if the body is brought back to England or Wales. Deaths in Scotland or bodies returned to Scotland including those of service personnel are dealt with under the Fatal Accidents and Sudden Death Inquiries Act 1976 which allows the relevant procurator fiscal to decide whether a fatal accident inquiry should be held or not.

Management Strategy

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be the budget holders for territorial units under the new management strategy; who will have the power to dismiss unsatisfactory clerical and stores staff in territorial units; and who will have the power to replace clerical staff in territorial units with contracted-out services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The general officer commanding the district in which the unit is located is the budget holder for all funds other than those administered by TAVRAs. Powers of dismissal are held under delegated authority by commanding officers not below the rank of colonel in respect of stores grades with less than five years service, and clerical staff during their probation period. Outside these categories, dismissal may be approved at major general or equivalent level only on the advice of personnel management staff at grade 7 level or above. District headquarters exercise the appropriate powers to replace clerical staff in territorial units with contracted-out services.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military were employed by his Department wholly or mainly on accounting and budget management duties in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1990; how many persons his Department envisages employing once the new management strategy is in place; and how many of these were concerned wholly or mainly on duties in connection with volunteer forces.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I will write to the hon. Member.

TA 2000

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is TA 2000; when its terms of reference were published; if he will place a copy in the Library; whether an interim progress report has been published; and what is its relationship to the study referred to in the debate of 21 February, *Official Report*, column 546.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: TA 2000 was the name given to an internal aide memoire prepared in the Ministry of Defence in 1989 which listed the current and future improvements then being considered for the TA. It was purely an internal management document to help co-ordination in the Ministry of Defence and is not appropriate for placing in the Library. It covered a wide range of activities including training. The study I referred to on 21 February is considering the organisation of training in order to make the best use of training time. This work was foreseen in TA 2000.

Bloodhound Missile

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the intended service life of the Bloodhound missile when it first came into service.

Mr. Alan Clark: Ten years, although this has been progressively extended through a variety of modifications.

RAF Personnel

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel left the service from *(a)* armament engineering, *(b)* mechanical engineering, *(c)* electrical engineering and *(d)* electronic engineering, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The numbers of ground airmen, including airwomen, in engineering trades who left the service each year since 1979 are as follows:

	Armaments	*Mechanical*	*Electrical*	*Electronic*
1980	100	610	155	433
1981	120	635	208	522
1982	157	729	217	606
1983	128	688	212	585
1984	139	660	213	551
1985	161	858	247	676
1986	147	921	258	702
1987	122	850	208	571
1988	170	1,005	310	808
1989	253	1,372	432	1,152
1990	170	1,157	330	808

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel became qualified to serve in *(a)* armament engineering, *(b)* mechanical engineering, *(c)* electrical engineering and *(d)* electronic engineering, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The numbers of ground airmen, including airwomen, who became qualified to serve in engineering trades are as follows:

	Armaments	*Mechanical*	*Electrical*	*Electronic*
CY 80	360	1,680	405	987
CY 81	371	1,552	397	833
CY 82	72	301	198	802
CY 83	276	153	324	571
CY 84	260	1,569	338	817
CY 85	222	1,075	252	942
CY 86	153	523	292	876
CY 87	152	632	224	739
CY 88	275	572	246	381
CY 89	248	794	169	516
CY 90	108	835	235	565

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many trained fast jet pilots *(a)* took premature voluntary retirement and *(b)* requested premature voluntary retirement in 1989-90.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number of fast jet pilots who took premature voluntary retirement in financial year 1989-90 was 47. The number who applied for voluntary retirement was 64.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF personnel served in *(a)* armament engineering, *(b)* mechanical engineering, *(c)* electrical engineering and *(d)* electronic engineering, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The numbers of ground airmen, including airwomen, who were employed on engineering duties in the RAF in each of the years after 1979 are as follows:

	Armaments	*Mechanical*	*Electrical*	*Electronic*
1 April 1980	2,493	14,346	3,727	9,633
1 April 1981	2,753	15,416	3,977	10,187
1 April 1982	3,004	16,333	4,166	9,498
1 April 1983	2,919	15,905	4,147	10,694
1 April 1984	3,067	15,370	4,259	10,680
1 April 1985	3,188	16,279	4,381	10,946
1 April 1986	3,249	16,496	4,386	11,212
1 April 1987	3,255	16,098	4,420	11,386
1 April 1988	3,285	15,880	4,436	11,554
1 April 1989	3,390	15,447	4,372	11,127
1 April 1990	3,385	14,868	4,110	10,491
1 April 1991	3,323	14,543	4,006	10,253

Prince Ranariddh (Visit)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Ministers and officials of his Department who met with Prince Ranariddh of Cambodia during his recent visit; and what was discussed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado aircraft are currently in storage.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Fourteen Tornado aircraft are currently in storage.

SCOTLAND

Civil Marriages

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the response of local authorities to the Registrar-General's request that schemes should be submitted to him for providing improved facilities for civil marriages within their areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Registrar-General has received interim responses from three of the 12 Scottish local registration authorities. As his letter of November 1990 suggested that authorities should undertake any local consultation procedures about terms and conditions of service of staff before submitting schemes to him, it was anticipated that full responses would take some time to prepare.

Public Appointments

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* all the paid appointments within his patronage and the annual remuneration paid to each one.

Mr. Lang: Table 1 shows the information requested as at 1 July 1990. Table 2 provides information in respect of those appointments for which I am jointly responsible with other Ministers. I have made appointments to four major new bodies since July. Scottish Enterprise has a chairman, salary £43,000, and 10 members, salary £6,000; Highlands and Islands Enterprise has a chairman, salary £57,105, one member with a salary of £52,650 and eight members with salaries of £6,000; the Health Education Board for Scotland has a chairman, salary £13,500, and 10 members, salary £2,000; and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland has a chairman, salary £20,000, four members with salaries of £8,616 and three members with salaries of £5,385.

Table 1
Paid appointments for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible as at 1 July 1990

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990 £
Argyll and Clyde health board	
Chairman	16,005
Ayrshire and Arran health board	
Chairman	13,415
Borders health board	
Chairman	10,810
Caledonian MacBrayne	
Chairman	15,000
Seven members	4,500
Central Scotland Woodlands Ltd.	
Chairman	Fee paid
Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland	
Chairman	7,939
Deputy chairman	5,030
Six members	2,500
Two members	2,650
Common Services Agency for the Scottish health service management committee	
Chairman	12,355

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990 £
Counsel to Secretary of State on private legislation procedure	
One member	10,994
One member	7,568
Countryside Commission for Scotland	
Chairman	15,365
Deputy chairman	6,422
Crofters Commission	
Chairman	36,848
Six members	9,393
Cumbernauld development corporation	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy chairman	7,804
Seven members	3,525
One member	3,735
Dumfries and Galloway health board	
Chairman	10,810
East Kilbride development corporation	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy chairman	8,272
Five members	3,525
Two members	3,735
Fife health board	
Chairman	13,415
Forth Valley health board	
Chairman	13,415
Glenrothes development corporation	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy chairman	7,804
Eight members	3,525
Grampian health board	
Chairman	18,250
Greater Glasgow health board	
Chairman	22,730
Highland and Islands development board (replaced by Highlands and Islands Enterprise from 1 April 1991)	
Chairman	56,540
Deputy chairman	52,130
One member	46,695
One member	41,500
Three members	8,123
Highland health board	
Chairman	13,415
Horse Race Betting Levy Appeal Tribunal for Scotland	
Two members	[1]109
Irvine development corporation	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy chairman	8,272
Seven members	3,735
Lanarkshire health board	
Chairman	16,005
Livingston development corporation	
Chairman	17,172
Deputy chairman	8,272
Five members	3,525
Two members	3,735
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland	
Chairman	4,691
Vice chairman	11,122
Three members	1,573
Lothian health board	
Chairman	20,490
Orkney health board	
Chairman	6,510
Preliminary review committee for life sentence prisoners	
Three members	[2]
Red deer commission	
Chairman	15,173
Rent assessment panel for Scotland	
President	12,471
Vice president	7,863
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	
Chairman	[1]137
Three members	[1]87
Scottish Dental Practice Board	
Chairman	33,991
Scottish Development Agency (replaced by Scottish Enterprise from 1 April 1991)	
Chairman	38,836
Deputy chairman	19,665
Five members	5,330
Scottish Homes	
Chairman	30,719
Deputy chairman	13,957
Seven members	5,330
Scottish Hydro-Electric PLC	
Chairman	39,750
Three members	4,860
Three members	60,000
One member	79,700
Scottish Legal Aid Board	
Chairman	17,170
14 members	8,529
Scottish Power PLC	
Chairman	66,900
Four members	4,860
One member	66,000
One member	63,000
One member	57,000
One member	54,000
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council	
Chairman	7,110
Scottish tourist board	
Chairman	28,048
Five members	5,330
Scottish Transport Group	
Chairman	64,610
Deputy chairman	12,922
One member	6,804
Three members	5,184
Shetland health board	
Chairman	6,510
State hospital management committee	
Chairman	11,955
Tayside health board	
Chairman	18,250

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990 £
Western Isles health board	
Chairman	6,510

[1] Per day.
[2] Varied daily fees paid.

Table 2
Paid appointments made jointly by Secretary of State for Scotland and other ministers as at 1 July 1990

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990 £
Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards	
Chairman	21,450
Deputy chairman	7,900
Agricultural Training Board	
Chairman	6,589
Deputy Chairman	6,041
British Wool Marketing Board	
Three members	5,675
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board	
Chairman	22,650
Director General of Electricity Supply	71,000
Food from Britain	
Chairman	30,000
Deputy chairman	4,290
One member	4,290
Nine members	1,895
Two members	1,804
Home Grown Cereals Authority	
Chairman	15,441
Deputy chairman	5,330
19 members	2,660
Horticultural Development Council	
Chairman	21,138
Deputy chairman	3,830
20 members	[1]25
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce	
Chairman	5,477
Meat and Livestock Commission	
Chairman	45,453
Deputy chairman	22,465
One member	10,840
Nine members	5,330
National Radiological Protection Board	
Chairman	9,310
12 members	[1]66
Sea Fish Industry Authority	
Chairman	25,490
10 members	5,330
United Kingdom Seeds Executive	
Chairman	6,689
Four members	2,382

[1] Per day.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: The total sums paid out by my Department in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation since 1979-80 are shown in the following table.

Year	*£ million*
1987-88	0·616
1988-89	2·246
1989-90	4·001
1990-91	[1]5·126

[1] Estimated outturn.

The total costs of the current privatisation of Scottish Power, Scottish Hydro-Electric and the Scottish Bus Group, including fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sales have been completed.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: The running costs of the Scottish Office information directorate for each year from 1985-86 are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1985-86	0·9
1986-87	1·0
1987-88	1·1
1988-89	1·2
1989-90	1·4
1990-91	1·7
[1]1991-92	1·9

[1] Plans.
These figures exclude expenditure on information campaigns.

Directly comparable figures for years prior to the introduction of new Scottish Office budgetary arrangements in 1985-86 are not available.

Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will break down the expenditure on industry, energy, trade and employment, excluding Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, in every year since 1986-87 and include plans for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* The information requested is shown in the table below. The figures for 1986-87 to 1989-90 are taken from the appropriation accounts. The figures for 1990-91 are consistent with those shown in the main estimates for 1991-92.

£ million[1]

	1986-87 Outturn	1987-88 Outturn	1988-89 Outturn	1989-90 Outturn	1990-91 Estimated outturn	1991-92 Plans
Regional Selective Assistance	41·2	43·2	41·3	40·5	67·4	73·8
Regional Development Grant	166·3	75·2	74·0	58·6	40·7	25·5
Regional Enterprise Grant	—	—	0·2	1·5	2·8	5·2
Central and Miscellaneous Services	0·5	0·2	0·3	0·3	1·2	0·6
Technical and Vocational Education Initiative	—	—	—	—	—	[2]13·8
Highlands and Islands Development Board	26·3	26·2	31·6	33·6	32·8	—
Scottish Development Agency	89·3	93·9	87·5	97·5	101·3	—
Total[3]	323·6	238·6	234·8	231·9	246·2	[4]118·9

Notes:

[1]Figures have been rounded to the nearest £0·1 million and totals may, in consequence, not add up.

[2]Prior to 1 April 1991 TVEI in Scotland was the responsibility of the Department of Employment.

[3]These are net figures. Total expenditure is higher when receipts are taken into account.

[4]Including Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise the total for 1991-92 would be £572·1 million. This figure includes provision for training.

Building Work

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list the number and location of all new buildings or extensions commissioned by his Department in each of the past five years which *(a)* had contracts worth between £3 million and £5 million and *(b)* had contracts worth more than £5 million.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* My Department has commissioned buildings as follows:

	£3 million to £5 million		Over £5 million	
	Number	Locations	Number	Locations
1986-87	—	—	two	Glasgow sheriff court Kilmarnock sheriff court
1987-88	—	—	—	—
1988-89	—	—	one	Parliament House extension, Edinburgh
1989-90	—	—	two	Edinburgh sheriff court Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen
1990-91	one	Falkirk sheriff court	—	—

Sand Eels

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the results of his monitoring of the sand-eel situation in Scottish waters.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The Scottish Office announced on 6 March that the sand-eel fishery in waters around Shetland would remain closed until spawning stock levels recover. This followed receipt of scientific advice that the downward trend in spawning stock levels had continued and that recruitment continued to be poor. The scientific advice on the fishery in the west of Scotland indicates that the stock is in a reasonable condition but that significant diversion of effort into the fishery would be undesirable. A consultation paper was therefore issued on 16 April proposing that effort limitation arrangements similar to those in force in 1990 should apply this year. Comments on the paper have been sought by 1 May and it is hoped that a final announcement on the management arrangements can be made shortly after that date.

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether it is the practice that all Forestry Commission land is advertised in the *Estates Gazette* when it is up for sale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 March, *Official Report*, column *689*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to introduce a child benefit for grandparents who care for a grandchild in the absence of the mother; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: A grandparent who is responsible for bringing up a grandchild can claim child benefit under the existing rules.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the full-year cost of raising child benefit in October to £9·55 a week for all children, assuming a corresponding increase in income-related benefit allowances for children and in child dependency increases paid with national insurance benefits, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: The cost for Great Britain over that of next October's actual benefit increases would be £695 million. Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Benefit (Young Persons)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) of 26 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns *494-95*, when he now expects to publish the results of research into the way in which benefit provision for 16 and 17-year-olds is working.

Mr. Jack: We expect to publish a report later in the spring.

Community Charge Benefit

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many community charge payers in Lambeth were in receipt of community charge benefit at the last period for which figures are available to his Department based on claims for refunds.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 14 February 1991 at column *578*.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of persons in each local authority area in Scotland in receipt of *(a)* full rebate of 80 per cent. of their community charge and *(b)* exemption from payment of 80 per cent. of their community charge.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is as follows:

Regional councils	*Persons in receipt of maximum 80 per cent. community charge benefit with income support as at November 1990*	*Persons exempt from payment of the community charge as at July 1990*
Borders	5,000	410
Central	22,000	4,080
Dumfries and Galloway	10,000	800
Fife	26,000	1,760
Grampian	24,000	3,400
Highland	11,000	780
Lothian	35,000	4,400
Strathclyde	274,000	35,110
Tayside	30,000	2,060
Orkney	1,000	320
Shetland	[1]1,000	260
Western Isles	4,000	140
Total Scotland	443,000	53,520

[1] Estimated.

In addition to the above exemptions there were, in July 1990, 99,460 students in Scotland who were liable to pay only 20 per cent. of the full community charge.

The number of people receiving maximum community charge benefit is slightly underestimated because a small number of people not in receipt of income support also receive the maximum benefit.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to publicise the arrangements and closing date for applications for claiming the special cold weather payments in respect of the February cold snap.

Mr. Scott: Advertisements placed in national and local newspapers at the time of the cold snap explained how to claim and advised that claims would be accepted up to three months after the period of cold weather. Local radio stations broadcast information and posters and leaflets were also distributed by local offices.

Single Payments (Appeals)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state, for the number of appeals made against the refusal of single payments needing supplementary benefit appeal tribunals in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88, what proportion were successful *(a)* where neither claimants nor representatives attended, *(b)* where the claimant attended but was unrepresented and *(c)* where the claimant attended with a representative.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

	1985-86 Per cent.	*1986-87 Per cent.*	*1987-88 Per cent.*
(a) Neither appellant nor representative attended	4·63	4·31	4·62
(b) Appellant only attended	10·95	9·67	9·25
(c) Appellant and representative attended	9·50	7·92	8·26

Housing Benefit

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many council tenants were in receipt of housing benefit at the end of the last period for which figures are available to his Department based on claims for refund of housing benefit by his Department to Lambeth.

Miss Widdecombe: As at 30 November 1990, the housing benefit rent rebate case load in the London borough of Lambeth was 20,931.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: No such fees have been identified, and no such expenditure is planned for 1991-92.

Pensions (Increases)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1991-92 of raising the single pension by £5 a week and the married pension by £8 a week above current levels *(a)* assuming a similar increase in income-related benefits and *(b)* net of income-related benefits, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The net additional cost of increasing the basic retirement pension in this way for pensioners in Great Britain would be *(a)* around £2·5 billion with a corresponding increase in income-related benefits and *(b)* around £1·6 billion with no such corresponding increase. Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Budgeting and Crisis Loans

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of his Bradford east office how many applications were received in 1990-91 for *(a)* budgeting loans and *(b)* crisis loans; and how many refusals there were in each category.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what allocations there were in 1988-89, 1989-90 and for 1991-92 in respect of *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans for each of the Bradford offices.

Mr. Scott: Information on allocations for all offices is available in the Library.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 of extending liability to national insurance contributions on *(a)* company cars and *(b)* free fuel to employees earning over £8,500 a year.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government's proposal to extend employers' national insurance contribution liability to the benefit gained from cars and fuel provided by them will have no effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92. It is estimated that these proposals will yield an extra £550 million in respect of cars, and £60 million in respect of fuel, for the 1991-92 year. However the payment to be made by employers in respect of the 1991-92 year will not be made until early in 1992-93. These amounts will be apportioned between the national insurance fund and the national health service. There will be no added liability on employees.

Tax paying employers will be able to claim corporation tax or income tax relief, which will reduce income to the Consolidated Fund by about £200 million in a full year.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in the financial year 1991-92 of raising the invalid care allowance to the level of the category A retirement pension, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: The estimated gross cost for Great Britain is £116·6 million. The estimate is based on the public expenditure plans contained in the current Departmental Report (Cm. 1514). Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in the financial year 1991-92 of converting all social fund loans into grants, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: The level of loan recoveries in 1991-92 assumed in determining the gross discretionary budget for Great Britain is £128 million—from past loans, as well as those made in 1991-92. This is not necessarily a valid estimate of the cost of converting all discretionary loans into grants, as the latter would fundamentally change the nature of the scheme.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures on social fund and single payment expenditure on the same basis as those provided to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North on 19 April, *Official Report*, column *270*, excluding any expenditure on maternity and funeral payments.

Mr. Scott: Direct comparisons between expenditure on single payments in 1987-88 and social fund expenditure in 1990-91 are misleading, given the very different scope of the two schemes.

The information requested is shown in the table. The figures exclude help with maternity expenses and assistance provided with the cost of funerals.

Single payments		
1987-88:	£214 million (cash)	£263 million (at 1990-91 prices[1])
Social fund		
1990-91 (provisional):	£232 million	12 per cent. (percentage reduction)

[1] Calculated using the estimated gross domestic product deflator.

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in the financial year 1991-92 of restoring entitlement to income support for all 16 and 17-year-olds at *(a)* the current benefit rate for under-25s and *(b)* the current benefit rate for people 25 and over, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to him on 12 December 1990 at column *424* which quoted figures for Great Britain. Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in the financial year 1991-92 of raising the income support personal allowance for people aged 18 to 24 years to the level of the personal allowance for those aged 25 and over, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost in the financial year 1991-92 of raising the income support personal allowance for people aged 18 to 24 years in Great Britain to the level of the personal allowance for those aged 25 and over would be around £185 million. There would be additional costs due to increased expenditure on housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1986-7-8 family expenditure surveys and the 1989 ASE uprated to 1991-92 price and benefit levels.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Horticultural Wholesalers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many horticultural wholesalers have gone out of business in England in the last 12 months.

Mr. Curry: I regret that the information is not available.

Meat and Livestock Commission

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the current members of the Meat and Livestock Commission, and give the relevant experience of each member; how many members of the commission are females; and what percentage of the total membership they comprise.

Mr. Maclean: The members of the Meat and Livestock Commission and their relevant interests are as follows. There are 13 commissioners, one of whom is a woman. This comprises 8 per cent. of the membership.

Mr. G. John—Chairman. Has a wide experience of the food industry, is non-executive Chairman of Dairy Crest Ltd. and serves on the Council of Food From Britain.

Mr. Werner Mattes—Deputy Chairman and founder member of Matteson's Meat Ltd.

Mrs. E. Rose—Chairman of Consumers' Committee of the MLC. Past Chairman of the Institute of Home Economics.

Mr. G. Adams—Extensive interests in fresh meat wholesaling, slaughtering and distribution of meat.

Mr. J. Baker—Joint Managing Director of the Baker Group of companies which includes Midland Meat Packers. A former President of the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers.

Mr. D. Curry—Hill farmer.

Mr. A. Mason—Chairman of Buchan Meats a farmer co-operative meat company.

Mr. Meuric Rees—Farmer.

Mr. P. Redshaw—Arable and livestock farmer. A member of the NFU Pigs Committee.

Mr. J. Royan—Retail butcher and past President of the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders.

Mr. A. Roxburgh—Past President of the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers.

Mr. C. Smith—Meat Trading Director of Tesco Stores Ltd.

Mr. J. Steer—Managing Director of British Beef Co. Ltd.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the number and incidence by year and county of confirmed bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases known to have been born to bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected dams.

Mr. Maclean: There have been 27 such cases, of which 26 were born before the ban on the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminant animals in July 1988. The breakdown is as follows:

County	*Year in which BSE in offspring confirmed*	*Number*
Avon	1990	2
Berkshire	1991	1
Cheshire	1991	1
Cornwall	1988	1
Cornwall	1990	2
Cornwall	1991	1
Devon	1989	1
Devon	1991	3
Dorset	1990	2
Dyfed	1991	1
Gloucestershire	1991	1
Hampshire	1989	1
Leicestershire	1990	2
Norfolk	1990	1
Oxfordshire	1990	1
Somerset	1989	1
Staffordshire	1990	1
Sussex West	1991	1
Wiltshire	1989	1
Wiltshire	1991	2

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing the incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in each county of England and Wales for the four-week periods ended 17 March and 17 April, respectively.

Mr. Maclean: The information for England and Wales is as follows:

County	*Confirmed cases four-week period ending 17 March 1991*	*Confirmed cases four-week period ending 17 April 1991*
Avon	36	18
Bedfordshire	3	1
Berkshire	5	9
Buckinghamshire	12	5
Cambridgeshire	5	1
Cheshire	49	53
Cleveland	0	1
Clwyd	22	11
Cornwall	91	61
Cumbria	24	16
Derbyshire	23	21
Devon	123	131
Dorset	91	99
Durham	3	3
Dyfed	72	66
Essex	5	0
Mid Glamorgan	2	2
South Glamorgan	5	1
West Glamorgan	0	2
Gloucestershire	50	37
Gwent	5	8
Gwynedd	3	2
Hampshire	44	16
Hereford and Worcester	9	29
Hertfordshire	5	5
Humberside	6	3
Isle of Wight	9	10
Kent	28	12
Lancashire	23	47
Leicestershire	35	25
Lincolnshire	13	11
London	1	0
Manchester	4	5
Norfolk	25	10
Northamptonshire	4	9
Northumberland	3	7
Nottinghamshire	11	5
Oxfordshire	14	15
Powys	14	8
Shropshire	20	41

County	Confirmed cases four-week period ending 17 March 1991	Confirmed cases four-week period ending 17 April 1991
Somerset	117	147
Staffordshire	21	21
Suffolk	25	13
Surrey	12	2
East Sussex	21	13
West Sussex	33	27
Tyne and Wear	1	0
West Midlands	0	1
Warwickshire	8	7
Wiltshire	81	78
North Yorkshire	58	44
South Yorkshire	4	1
West Yorkshire	2	6
TOTAL	1,280	1,166

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning the location of the live progeny of bovine spongiform encephalopathy cows.

Mr. Maclean: Information on offspring is recorded as part of the epidemiological inquiry. In addition, since 15 October 1990, farmers have been required to maintain breeding records for cattle; and to keep both these and movement records for 10 years. The offspring of confirmed cases can therefore be traced if necessary.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the current number of live cattle which are the offspring of cows confirmed as suffering from bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: Up to 12 April 1991, the number of offspring recorded as live at the time that epidemiological inquiries were made into each case is 20,694. A number of these will have subsequently been slaughtered or died.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research he has undertaken to ascertain whether confirmed bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases born to confirmed bovine spongiform encephalopathy dams had suffered vertical transmission of the disease;

(2) if he has any proposals to restrict the use for breeding purposes of cattle which are themselves the progeny of bovine spongiform encephalopathy cows;

(3) if he will publish the latest information he has concerning the possible vertical transmission of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) on 27 March 1991 at columns *471-74*.

Farm Water Supplies

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representation he has received from farming businesses over the National River Authority's proposals to charge *(a)* for discharge consents and *(b)* for the monitoring of pure water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Prior to the National Rivers Authority issuing its formal proposals on charges for discharge consents, the Department received representations from individuals and organisations in the fish farming industry, a watercress grower and the Country Landowners Association. These were conveyed to the authority, which took them into account in formulating its proposals. The authority does not have plans to charge for the monitoring of pure water supplies. Earlier this year, the Government issued a consultation paper on private water supplies, which contained details of a proposed local authority charging regime for monitoring. The comments received are being considered by the Departments concerned.

Cattle (Illegal Hormones)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received alleging unfair competition from the giving of illegal hormones to cattle in other EC countries; whether he has raised this matter with the European Commission; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received urging the desirability of increasing the number of tests on imported beef for hormones and clenbuterol; and if he will make a statement on measures to protect both producers and consumers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: We have received a number of representations recently about veterinary drug abuse in the European Community and the testing which is carried out. Under the residues directive 86/469, EC member states are required to carry out a programme of monitoring for residues of veterinary drugs, including hormones and other illegal growth promoters. The Ministry also has in place a programme of surveillance specifically directed at veterinary drug residues in imported meat, including hormones and clenbuterol.

Surveillance for clenbuterol is being stepped up in 1991, both in terms of the number of animals tested and the range of cattle covered. The position is under continuing review, and if there is evidence of a particular problem, urgent consideration will be given to further increases in the level of monitoring.

We have not raised this matter with the European Commission although we have discussed the situation with the Irish Minister of Agriculture, and offered him our full support in the steps he is taking against illegal clenbuterol use in the Irish Republic.

Agricultural Products

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North, 26 March, *Official Report*, column *378*, what was the degree of self-sufficiency in the United Kingdom, European Community, United States of America, Canada and the Cairns group countries of all agricultural products in the years 1979, 1985 and the latest year available.

Mr. Curry: United Kingdom self-sufficiency in all food and feed was as follows: 1979, 53·1 per cent.; 1985, 57·7 per cent.; 1990 (provisional) 56·4 per cent. Corresponding information for the other countries referred to is not readily available.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each of the environmentally-sensitive areas established in England and for each year of each scheme's existence, the number of applicants for entry, the number of applicants accepted for entry and the numbers of successful applicants who have subsequently withdrawn from each scheme.

Mr. Curry: The table shows the number of applications in each of the 10 ESAs in England, together with the number of agreements reached for each year of the schemes operations. No agreement holders have subsequently withdrawn.

	1987		*1988*		*1989*		*1990*		*1991*
	Applications	*Agreements*	*Applications*	*Agreements*	*Applications*	*Agreements*	*Applications*	*Agreements*	*Applications up to 31 March 1991*
Broads	413	393	239	220	65	55	38	33	17
Pennine dales	232	221	39	34	34	22	20	12	14
Somerset levels	566	524	148	117	75	59	48	41	36
South downs	58	58	65	62	38	37	24	23	5
West Penwith	158	158	10	9	12	10	3	2	1
Breckland	—	—	86	84	36	32	24	23	11
North peak	—	—	77	66	8	8	3	3	1
Shropshire borders	—	—	184	161	37	27	20	18	24
Suffolk river valleys	—	—	287	272	80	77	50	44	31
Test valley	—	—	15	13	6	6	2	1	0

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *634*, he expects to announce the result of his review of environmentally sensitive areas policy.

Mr. Curry: As soon as we have completed our deliberations.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *634*, he will publish the studies conducted for him on the costs and savings of his environmentally sensitive areas policy; and what are the conclusions of his evaluation of these studies.

Mr. Curry: We intend to publish reports summarising the results of the economic and environmental monitoring of the five environmentally sensitive areas designated in 1987. The conclusions drawn from our evaluation will be clear when we announce the results of our review of ESA policy.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those organisations which he has consulted during his review of hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Mr. Curry: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 15 April at column 41.

GATT and Codex Alimentarius Commission

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his policy on the selection of United Kingdom representatives to GATT.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission negotiates in GATT on behalf of member states and in consultation with them. Attendance of Ministers or officials at any meeting is determined in accordance with the nature of the meeting and the subjects under discussion.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his Department's procedures for giving formal advice to the United Kingdom delegations to GATT, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and their respective committees.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission negotiates in GATT on behalf of the member States, and in close consultation with their representatives. My officials prepare negotiating briefs for the United Kingdom permanent delegates to GATT which take into account the wide range of United Kingdom interests in the subjects under discussion, and attend important meetings with them. In the codex, the Commission negotiates on matters within Community competence, while on others member States speak individually. The United Kingdom delegation to codex meetings includes officials from my Department when appropriate and may include industry or consumer representatives who can be consulted in the course of discussion.

Meetings

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those organisations with which he has had formal meetings regarding the United Kingdom's position on the GATT negotiations; and how often he has met representatives of *(a)* the National Farmers Union, *(b)* the TGWU agricultural workers section, *(c)* the National Consumer Council, *(d)* the Consumers Association, *(e)* the National Food Alliance, *(f)* Oxfam, *(g)* the National Office of Animal Health, *(h)* the Catholic Institute for International Relations, *(i)* Christian Aid, *(j)* the Retail Consortium, *(k)* the CBI, *(l)* UKASTA and *(m)* the Fertiliser Manufacturers Association, to discuss the United Kingdom's position in those negotiations.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom has played a leading part in development of the Community approach to the agriculture negotiations in GATT. We have discussed the issues and United Kingdom interests with a wide range of organisations on many occasions. To provide precise details of these frequent consultations could only be done at disproportionate cost to public funds.

Wheat and Grain

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Ariculture, Fisheries and Food what is the level of intervention stock of *(a)* wheat and *(b)* grain estimated for July 1991 in the United Kingdom; and how many days' supply this represents.

Mr. Curry: Current estimates of wheat and grain likely to be in intervention stores in the United Kingdom at the end of the 1990-91 marketing year on 30 June 1991, and the days' supply these represent, are as follows:

	Million tonnes	*Days' supply*
Wheat	0	0
Grain	0·67	12

Banana Regime

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of the EC's banana regime post-1991.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission is currently considering arrangements to apply to bananas in the single European market post-1992, but has not yet come forward with proposals. We are making it clear to the Commission and other member states that any new arrangements must fulfil our commitments to Commonwealth Caribbean suppliers and that they should take account of consumer interests, budgetary discipline, trade policy considerations and the competition and efficiency objectives of the single market initiative.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: The Department has not paid any sums to outside organisations for the furtherance of privatisation in the period 1979-80 to 1989-90. We keep continually under review the contribution that the Department might make to the Government's privatisation policy.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: The information required for the financial years 1979-80 to 1983-84 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The figures for the subsequent years are as follows:

	£ million
1984-85	3·2
1985-86	3·5
1986-87	3·0
1987-88	0·6
1988-89	0·8
1989-90	1·1
1990-91	0·5

Figures for the years 1984-85 to 1986-87 refer to the total cost of press services and paid publicity which could be separated to show expenditure on press services only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1987-88 to 1989-90 relate to press services alone. The estimated budget for press services for 1991-92 is £0·6 million.

Sweeteners in Food Directive

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate he has made of the loss of sales and jobs which will accrue from the exclusion of snack foods from the sweeteners in food directive 8745/90;

(2) if he will seek to clarify the reasons why Mr. Bangemann, the European Commissioner, decided on 15 April that snack foods should not be covered by the sweeteners in food directive 8745/90;

(3) if he will explain the reasons for his confidence that snack food would be covered by the sweeteners in food directive 8745/90; and why he prepared the explanatory papers for Standing Committee A on the basis that they would be so covered;

(4) if he is aware of any specific health hazards which would accrue from the inclusion of snack food within the terms of the sweeteners in food directive 8745/90.

Mr. Curry: Consideration of sweeteners by the United Kingdom's independent expert advisory committees, following official surveys to monitor sweetener intakes, has revealed no health hazard from the current inclusion of these substances in snack foods. We are not aware that the matter has been reviewed by any other expert body. Accordingly, we see no health grounds why the draft EC sweeteners in food directive should not provide for the continuation of this existing practice. We are urgently seeking to clarify why the EC Commission's attitude on this matter appears to have changed since the preparation of the explanatory memorandum for Standing Committee A on the proposals.

It is the industry's view that sales of £70 million a year would be jeopardised if snack foods did not appear in the Directive. Whether jobs would be lost would depend on the industry's ability to reformulate the flavours concerned or divert resources to other products.

We aim to highlight identified problem areas in the explanatory memorandum prepared for Standing Committee A. Our expectation, after long negotiations, was that no difficulty existed and that this existing use could be continued. All the indications given by the Commission staff to this officials were that matters would be arranged so as to facilitate this. Industry representatives and Members of the European Parliament who could discuss the matter with Commission officials met the same response. We are urgently seeking to clarify why the Commission's attitude on this matter has since changed.

European Standing Committees

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to ensure that explanatory notes submitted to European Standing

Committees are based on the terms of the directive; and if he will make it his policy to disregard in such notes expectations by his Department that changes might be permitted by the European Commission.

Mr. Curry: Explanatory memoranda are the means by which Parliament is kept in touch with, and is able to comment on, draft EC legislation. All Government explanatory memoranda follow a standard format. This provides for a factual account of the documents under consideration, but it also allows for the inclusion of additional information, which may depart from the official text. The sole purpose is to keep Parliament as fully informed as possible, and we believe that this is generally welcomed by members of this House. We will try to ensure that all relevant information is included in such documents.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 1 May 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Wales and Chester Circuit

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any proposals for additional combined Crown and county court centres on the Wales and Chester circuit; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: It is the Lord Chancellor's policy to create combined court centres wherever it is possible to do so. There are at present two combined court centres on the Wales and Chester circuit, at Merthyr Tydfil and Warrington. The creation of an additional combined court centre at Caernarfon is under consideration.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give details of current proposals to improve and construct Crown and county court accommodation on the Wales and Chester circuit; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: There is an annual programme of planned building maintenance covering all Crown and county court buildings on the Wales and Chester circuit, which comprise 52 properties including 11 listed buildings. In addition, the circuit uses 27 courtrooms hired when needed from local authorities.

Funds have been made available in 1991-92 for major building improvements to the law courts at Cathays park, Cardiff, and maintenance improvements to the Guildhall in Swansea.

The current court building programme comprises:

Schemes currently in construction
- Crown court at Chester
- Crown court at Newport (Gwent)
- Warrington combined court centre

Schemes at the planning or design stage
- Cardiff county court
- Crown court at Cardiff (adaptation)
- Neath and Port Talbot county court
- Pontypool county court
- Pontypridd county court

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any proposals to improve the co-ordination of courts listing centres and Crown court centres and combined centres on the Wales and Chester circuit; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The courts have already taken steps to improve listing for both civil and criminal work on all circuits. Greater co-ordination has already been achieved with the emergence of more combined courts and county court trial centres. The practice of allowing listing officers to develop an expertise by remaining sufficiently long in post should ensure that the improvements continue. All listing arrangements are kept under regular review.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Home Office Domestic Properties

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of Home Office domestic properties there are in the City of Durham constituency; how many of these properties since 1985 have been unoccupied at any time for *(a)* over six months, *(b)* one year, *(c)* two years or *(d)* longer; and how many are unoccupied at the present time.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The total number of domestic properties owned by the Home Office in the City of Durham constituency, which includes the prison establishments of Durham, Frankland and Low Newton, is 79, of which 28 are at present unoccupied. Of these 28 properties, 23 are currently on the market for sale and five are retained for re-allocation.

Accurate figures as to the length of time properties have been vacant since 1985 are not readily available, but of the 28 properties at present vacant, four have been unoccupied for over six months, two for one year, two for two years and 19 for longer than two years.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer on 22 April, *Official Report*, column *350*, if there is any reason or issue of public policy which requires the factual information about whether a driver killed in a road crash had consumed alcohol to be kept secret until a court case or coroner's inquest.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The sub judice rule applies to both criminal proceedings and coroner's inquests. In the case of an inquest, it is entirely a matter for the coroner, who is an independent judicial officer, to decide in the light of the circumstances of a particular case, what information he may properly release in advance of the hearing.

Northern Ireland Prisoners (Transfers)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedure is followed when a prisoner from Northern Ireland who is imprisoned in England requests a transfer to a Northern Ireland prison.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The general procedure for handling prisoners' requests and complaints is set out in Prison Standing Order 5C, a copy of which is in the Library. Requests for transfers to Northern Ireland are considered in consultation with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under criteria announced by the then Home Secretary on 23 June 1989 at column *265*.

Civil Protection Co-ordination Group

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was discussed at his meeting with the civil protection co-ordination group on 24 April; if he will place a note of the meeting in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The meeting was held at the request of the civil protection co-ordination group to give the group the opportunity to put to my right hon. Friend its

views on the need to maintain a civil defence capability; on the future of planning for civil emergencies in peacetime; and on the case for a new Civil Protection Act. It is not our practice to publish the notes of such meetings.

Polling Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to publish guidelines to district councils concerning the physical accessibility of polling stations and the need to inform disabled people in advance of the physical accessibility of a polling station.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Existing Home Office guidelines to district and London borough councils in England and Wales emphasise their statutory obligation to designate as polling places, so far as is practicable, only places which are accessible to disabled people. We shall discuss with representatives of local authorities whether there are other ways of making it easier for disabled people to exercise their right to vote.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: For information before 1989-90, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the then Home Secretary on 15 March 1990 at column *360*.

The equivalent estimate of payments made for the financial year 1989-90 is £1,566,000; the latest estimated expenditure for 1990-91 is £2,909,000 and the budget for 1991-92 is £1,100,000.

Data Protection Registrar (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Office of the Data Protection Registrar; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand that the office of the Data Protection Registrar does not have a specialist statistical division or staff. Statistics are produced and analysed by his staff as part of their normal duties.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued with regard to the amount of bail to be lodged in respect of asylum seekers released after detention; and what is the average amount of bail demanded in *(a)* December 1990 and *(b)* April 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. The grant of bail is a judicial decision for the individual adjudicator. The other information requested is not recorded centrally.

Animal Experiments

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has concerning the percentage of all licensed animal experiments in the latest year for which figures are available which were carried out for the development of cosmetics and toiletries.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The only statistics collected on cosmetics and toiletries relate to procedures carried out in safety evaluation. In 1989 less than 0·4 per cent. of all procedures started in Great Britain were concerned with the safety testing of cosmetics and toiletries.

Paul Alexander Cleeland (Trial)

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that the Home Office document on Paul Alexander Cleeland's trial, dated February 1987, which has been deposited in the Library, is corrected to reflect accurately the courts transcript of Mr. Justice Lane's summing up concerning Mr. McGafferty's forensic evidence; and if he will make an authoritative statement to establish the truth on this matter.

Mr. John Patten: We will make arrangements for the necessary amendment to be made to the Home Office memorandum on the case of Mr. Paul Cleeland and for a copy of the revised document to be placed in the Library. My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary will take account of the significance of this error in considering whether there are grounds to intervene in Mr. Cleeland's conviction.

Police Forces (Costs)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the total costs of provincial police forces will be met from all central sources of funding, direct and indirect, in the current financial year; and what percentage will be raised locally.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Specific grant will be paid at the rate of 51 per cent. on all provincial police forces' revenue expenditure and on approved capital expenditure. A proportion of the remaining 49 per cent. is provided by central Government through revenue support grant, redistributed business rates and community charge grant. Support other than specific grant is not hypothecated to particular services, and decisions on what portion of this other support should go to meet police expenditure are at the discretion of the local authority concerned. We estimate that, overall, some 90 per cent. of police expenditure is met directly or indirectly through central funding, including revenue support grant redistributed business rates and community charge grant.

Drug-related Offences

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been charged, over the last five years, for drug-related offences in the Stoke Newington division of the Metropolitan police district; and what is the rate of such charges in Stoke Newington relative to other Metropolitan police district divisions;

(2) what is the average length of sentence for those charged and convicted for drug-related offences in the

Hackney division of the Metropolitan police district in the last five years; and what is the national average for offences in the same category;

(3) how many of those charged with drug-related offences as a result of the activities of the Stoke Newington division of the Metropolitan police have been found guilty in the last five years;

(4) how many drug-related arrests were made by the Stoke Newington division of the Metropolitan police in the last five years; and what is the rate of such arrests in Stoke Newington relative to other Metropolitan police district divisions.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 18 April 1991]:* The information requested, which relates to the Stoke Newington division of the Metropolitan Police district, is contained in the tables below.

Table 1
Persons arrested for, charged with and found guilty of, drug offences:
Stoke Newington division of the Metropolitan police (MPD)

Number of persons

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Arrests[1]	147	231	246	329
Percentage of all MPD drug arrests[1]	*1·5*	*2·2*	*1·6*	*1·7*
Charged[1 2]	113	173	173	213
Percentage of all charged by MPD with drug offences	*1·4*	*2·3*	*1·6*	*1·6*
Found guilty	129	93	71	125
Sentenced to immediate custody	43	26	22	29

[1] *Source:* Metropolitan police.
[2] The number of persons charged, and the number dealt with at court, may not be consistent because a person charged may not appear in court until the following year.

Table 2
Average sentence, length of those sentenced to immediate custody for drug offences:
Stoke Newington division of the Metropolitan police (MPD) and United Kingdom national average

Months

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Stoke Newington division of MPD	31·2	22·3	25·0	21·6
United Kingdom national average	19·8	20·9	21·3	23·6

TRANSPORT

London Docklands

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will supply figures for each financial year since 1981 for the amount of public expenditure by his Department on *(a)* public transport infrastructure and *(b)* road infrastructure that is either in the London docklands urban development area or will serve it.

Mr. Roger Freeman: The Department of Transport makes grants to British Rail and, since 1984, to London Regional Transport—LRT. It is the responsibility of those two organisations to provide public transport infrastructure to and within docklands. Capital expenditure on the Docklands light railway by LRT, including contributions from developers, has been as follows:

	£ million
1984-85	26
1985-86	33
1986-87	16
1987-88	61
1988-89	51
1989-90	93
1990-91	153

Information on expenditure by London Buses, London Underground and Network SouthEast on infrastructure serving docklands is not readily available.

The Government have made a grant of £500,000 to the consortium responsible for the riverbus service.

The following schemes in the national road programme which serve the London Docklands area were completed or under construction during this period:

A2 Rochester Way Relief Road
A13 Leamouth Road
A13 West India Dock Road
A406 South Woodford-Barking Relief Road
East London Traffic Control System

Expenditure on these schemes was:

	£ million
Up to 1987-88	119
1988-89	11
1989-90	10
1990-91	15

The Department is also responsible for maintenance and minor improvements to trunk roads in this area, and for the operation of the Woolwich ferry. Expenditure was as follows. Detailed figures for years prior to 1987-88 are not readily available.

	£ million
1987-88	3
1988-89	6
1989-90	8
1990-91	12

British Rail (Investment)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investment has been approved for repairing and improving the British Rail track signalling systems *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in Scotland.

Mr. Freeman: Approvals of this kind are generally a matter for British Rail. I understand from British Rail that some £358·4 million, at 1990-91 prices, of investment has been authorised so far on signalling and track schemes over the next five years. This includes £8·5 million for the Scottish region. Figures are not available for minor repair work that is not classified as investment.

The Minch (Fishing Boat Incidents)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the number of recorded incidents involving fishing boats and oil tankers in the Minch for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Numerous incidents off north-west Scotland have been recorded by the coastguard during the period but it is not possible to isolate those involving fishing vessels in the Minches. Two minor incidents

involving tankers in the Minches have been identified, one in 1981 and one in 1984, neither of which involved any other vessel.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest figures for fees paid by the Department to management consultants are as follows:

	£
1984-85	250,000
1985-86	272,000
1986-87	218,000
1987-88	371,000
1988-89	604,000
1989-90	734,000
1990-91	[1]843,000
1991-92	[2]580,000

[1] Latest estimate.
[2] Budget.
This excludes fees on computing consultancies.

Information for earlier years could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Railway Crossings

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many manually controlled gated railway crossings are still operational in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will list the level crossings in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom which are protected by wooden gates; and which of those have been listed;

(3) if he will list in the *Official Report* the locations of the remaining manually controlled gated railway crossings in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information is not readily available.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average annual cost of a manually controlled gated railway crossing to British Rail; and what specific assistance he provides towards meeting this cost.

Mr. McLoughlin: The average annual cost is about £52,500. A level crossing grant of 50 per cent. is paid by the Government, under EC Regulation 1192/69, towards the cost of maintaining and operating level crossings.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will ensure that hon. Members are given full access to the evidence of the W. S. Atkins review into the channel tunnel rail link;

(2) if he will place in the Library the full report and findings of the W. S. Atkins review into the channel tunnel rail link;

(3) if he will state the terms of reference given to W. S. Atkins for it to make an appraisal of the alternative schemes for the channel tunnel rail link;

(4) what steps he has taken to assure himself that W. S. Atkins was given all information required to make a proper professional appraisal of alternative schemes for the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: An interim report by W. S. Atkins, a copy of which is in the Library, contains the terms of reference for its review of the objectivity of British Rail's study of route options for the rail link. It has been for W. S. Atkins to decide what information it needed. The results of British Rail's study, which I expect to receive shortly, will be accompanied by the final report by W. S. Atkins, which will be published in due course.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that Coopers and Lybrand was given all information required to make a proper professional appraisal of alternative schemes for the channel tunnel rail link;

(2) if he will state the terms of reference given to Coopers and Lybrand for it to make an appraisal of alternative schemes for the channel tunnel rail link;

(3) if he will ensure the full report by Coopers and Lybrand into traffic forecasts for the channel tunnel rail link is placed in the Library.

Mr. Freeman: Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte was commissioned by British Rail to evaluate the benefits for commuter services of alternative routes for a high speed channel tunnel rail link. It has been its responsibility to obtain whatever information it needed. Its evaluation will form part of the report on the rail link project which we expect to receive soon from British Rail, but in advance of our receiving and considering that report I cannot say what specific documents it will consist of and what documents will be published.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek an explanation from British Rail as to the reasons for the delay in publication of the review into the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail expects to submit its proposals to my right hon. and learned Friend this month.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that a full review of the environmental impact of the various channel tunnel rail link projects is made available in the Library.

Mr. Freeman: Environmental considerations will form part of the assessment British Rail are making of the route options for the rail link. They are therefore likely to be included in the material that will in due course be published.

Public Transport

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the scope and purpose of the public service obligation grant in funding public transport in Wales; what has been the level of grant in Wales in each year since 1985-86; which projects have been assisted; and what is the estimated amount of public service obligation grant to be spent in Wales in 1991-92.

Mr. Freeman: Subsidy is paid by the Government to the British Railways board in the form of the Public Service Obligation grant under EC regulation 1191/69 and section

3 of the Railways Act 1974, which compensates BR for maintaining loss making passenger services. Grant is paid as a total to the board and the Government do not allocate it between sectors or geographical areas. Figures for PSO grant in respect of each of the past five years are given in the table. The figure for 1991-92 has not yet been decided.

	Cash £ million	*1990-91 prices £ million*
1986-87	690	883
1987-88	761	925
1988-89	534	606
1989-90	499	520
1990-91	600	600

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

The Times

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, what information he has on whether *The Times* volunteered to surrender some of its space when it dropped Times Parliamentary Debates in 1897 or its mini-*Hansard* in 1991.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not aware of any such suggestion from *The Times*.

Select Committees

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he will publish the Government's response to the second report of Session 1989-90 from the House of Commons Select Committee on Procedure on the working of the Select Committee system.

Mr. MacGregor: I have today published the Government response and copies have been placed in the Library.

The Government welcome the Procedure Committee's comprehensive report, the first Parliamentary inquiry into the present system since it was set up in 1979. The Select Committee system has been shown to be sound, with no need for major reform. The Committees are making an important contribution to parliamentary scrutiny of the Executive.

The Government welcome and accept most of the recommendations addressed to them by the Procedure Committee. Amendments to standing orders will be brought forward shortly:

—to increase the size of the Education, Science and Arts Committee and empower it to appoint a Sub-Committee to look at science and technology issues;

—to extend select committee scrutiny to matters within the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments, including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals but excluding individual cases and appointments, advice given within government by the Law Officers, and prosecution policy.

The Government welcome the proposed liaison arrangements, aimed at reducing unproductive duplication and overlap between the Public Accounts Committee and the departmental select committees. They accept the recommendations concerning the role of the National Audit Office, subject to understandings designed to ensure that any use made by the departmental select committees of NAO resources does not prejudice the main thrust of the NAO's work for the PAC.

The Government also reaffirm their existing policy to make as much information as possible available to Select Committees. Their approach will continue to be constructive and open within certain well-established conventions which can be justified in the interests of good government.

Lighting (Chamber)

Mr. Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council what arrangements have been made to exhibit prototypes of the proposed new lighting system for the Chamber.

Mr. MacGregor: As is said in paragraph 131 of the First Report of the Select Committee on Broadcasting (HC 11 of Session 1990-91), work has been continuing "to find a suitable design for a new permanent lighting system [for the Chamber] which not only meets the technical specifications for the production of television pictures of broadcastable quality, but which is also aesthetically acceptable".

A suitable design, an illustrative sketch of which was published with the Select Committee's report, has now been produced by the Parliamentary Works Office on the basis of specifications drawn up by the Committee's technical advisers, and, so far as aesthetic considerations are concerned, with the collaboration of English Heritage. Although the latter would have preferred a solution which involved upgrading the existing ceiling lights, detailed camera tests have indicated that such an approach would not have provided illumination of the quality required for broadcasting purposes. English Heritage are, however, content that the proposed design represents an acceptable compromise, given the need, on technical grounds, for some form of suspended lighting.

In order to give the House a proper opportunity to evaluate the appearance of the new lights under operational conditions, it is proposed that a pair of full-size prototypes should be hung in the Chamber from Tuesday 7 May to Friday 17 May inclusive. The prototypes, which will be fully lit for televising purposes, will be accompanied by four of the existing temporary lanterns—the remaining four will be winched up to the ceiling. Trials carried out before the Easter recess have indicated provisionally that it should be possible to achieve the required level of illumination under the permanent system by fitting only six of the proposed new lights.

The points at which the prototypes are hung for demonstration purposes will not necessarily coincide exactly with their eventual permanent positions and there will be some unavoidable asymmetry as between the prototypes and the four existing temporary lights during the two weeks trial period. This will of course be rectified as part of the permanent installation, which, assuming a favourable response to the trial, is expected to take place during the coming summer recess.

The prototypes make use of the most up to date lighting technology, which should provide advantages over the temporary lanterns in two distinct areas. First, the new design allows for the set of tubular strip-lights fitted behind each of the six opaque glass panels forming the hexagonal outer casing of the lamps to be dimmed

separately, thus enabling any potential problems of glare for those working in the Galleries to be minimised. Second, the prototypes offer significant gains in energy efficiency, with the result that the total heat output from the six proposed new lights will be only about a quarter of that generated by the eight existing makeshift chandeliers.

Right hon. and hon. Members, and others working within the House, who wish to express a view on the proposed new lights are requested to write to the Clerk of the Select Committee on Broadcasting, Committee Office, House of Commons by 23 May.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Budget

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will quantify the contingency reserve within the aid budget for the year April 1991 to March 1992 specifying how much has been allowed and dispensed to date and for what purposes; and if he will give comparable figures for last year's contingency fund referred to in the evidence of the Minister for Overseas Development to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on 17 April, question 518.

Mrs. Chalker: The contingency reserve within the overseas aid budget for developing countries is part of ODA's internal planning arrangements for the in-year management of the aid programme, and enables the ODA to respond to unforeseen events and changed circumstances. It may be drawn down to augment existing planned development programmes, and supplemented should savings arise. It is also used as necessary to supplement our humanitarian assistance and commence new programmes of development assistance.

For 1991-92, the contingency reserve was initially set at £70 million. Of the total sums committed for Iraqi refugee relief so far this year, totalling £61·5 million, £19·5 million has been drawn from the contingency reserve. Parliamentary approval for expenditure arising from this and other dispositions will be sought as appropriate through the estimates.

For 1990-91, the contingency reserve was initially set at £40 million, of which £14 million was allocated for humanitarian assistance, and £200,000 was allocated to establish a new small enterprise development fund.

Overseas Development Administration (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the ODA; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State on 29 April.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *85-86*, if he will list in the *Official Report*, any further units of central Government that are under consideration for agency status, their parent department, and the numbers of staff employed.

Mr. Renton: The current list of activities announced as candidates for agency status, together with their parent departments and staff employed is as follows:

Candidate name	*Parent department*	*Staff*
ADAS Agency	Agriculture	2,500
Agricultural Scientific Services[1]	Agriculture	130
Central Science Laboratory	Agriculture	340
Central Statistical Office	[2]	1,050
Chessington Computer Centre	Treasury	440
Child Support Agency[3]	Social Security	Not yet known
Fire Service College[1]	Home Office	200
Fuel Suppliers Branch	Environment	30
Medicines Control Agency[1]	Health	350
Pesticide Safety Division[1]	Agriculture	160
Planning Inspectorate	Environment	570
Pollution Inspectorate	Environment	230
Property Holdings	Environment	1,650
Public Record Office[1]	Lord Chancellor	430
RAF Training[4]	Defence	2,500
Royal Parks	Environment	600
Teachers' Pensions Branch[1]	Education	300
The Buying Agency [1 5]	Environment	120
Transport Road Research Laboratory[1]	Transport	580
Valuation Office	Inland Revenue	5,250
Youth Treatment Service	Health	210

Candidate name	Parent department	Staff
Ordnance Survey	Northern Ireland	200
Social Security Operations	Northern Ireland	5,000
23 in number		22,840
Inland Revenue[6] (excluding Valuation Office)	[2]	59,800
		82,640

[1] Agency candidates publicly identified as under consideration since 4 December 1990. Staffing figures were current on the date of announcement.
[2] Independent Government Department.
[3] From 1 April 1993 the agency is estimated to require 4,500 staff, 1,500 of which will come from the Social Security Benefits Agency.
[4] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[5] Trading Fund.
[6] Moving towards full operation on Next Step lines in accordance with the Action Plan of February 1991: 33 Executive Offices by April 1992, each with a Framework Document, sharper accountabilities and wider managerial freedoms.
Staffing Figures are based on staff in post 1 October 1990.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) *Official Report*, 15 April, column *37-39*, if he will list, for all the executive agencies listed therein, their parent Department and the date on which they were established.

Mr. Tim Renton: The list of agencies together with their parent Department and date on which they were established is as follows:

Agency Name	Parent Department	Established
Building Research Establishment	Environment	2 April 1990
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	Welsh Office	1 April 1991
Central Office of Information[1]	[2]	5 April 1990
Central Veterinary Laboratory	Agriculture	2 April 1990
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment[3]	Defence	1 April 1991
Civil Service College	OMCS	6 June 1989
Companies House	Trade and Industry	3 October 1988
Defence Research Agency	Defence	1 April 1991
Directorate General of Defence Accounts[3]	Defence	1 April 1991
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Transport	2 April 1990
Driving Standards Agency	Transport	2 April 1990
Employment Service	Employment	2 April 1990
Forensic Science Service	Home Office	1 April 1991
Historic Royal Palaces	Environment	1 October 1989
Historic Scotland	Scottish Office	1 April 1991
HMSO[1]	[2]	14 December 1988
Hydrographic Office[3]	Defence	6 April 1990
Information Technology Services Agency	Social Security	2 April 1990
Insolvency Service	Trade and Industry	21 March 1990
Intervention Board	[2]	2 April 1990
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	Trade and Industry	30 October 1989
Land Registry	[2]	2 July 1990
Meteorological Office	Defence	2 April 1990
Military Survey[3]	Defence	1 April 1991
National Engineering Laboratory	Trade and Industry	5 October 1990
National Physical Laboratory	Trade and Industry	3 July 1990
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	Trade and Industry	18 April 1989
Natural Resources Institute	ODA	2 April 1990
NHS Estates	Health	1 April 1991
Occupational Health Service	OMCS	2 April 1990
Ordnance Survey	[2]	1 May 1990
Patent Office	Trade and Industry	1 March 1990
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	Environment	6 July 1990
Radiocommunications Agency	Trade and Industry	2 April 1990
RAF Maintenance[3]	Defence	1 April 1991
Rate Collection Agency	Northern Ireland	1 April 1991
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	OMCS	1 April 1991
Registers of Scotland	[2]	6 April 1990
Resettlement Agency	Social Security	24 May 1990
Royal Mint[1]	[2]	2 April 1990
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	Scottish Office	1 April 1991
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)[3]	Defence	1 April 1991
Social Security Benefits Agency	Social Security	2 April 1991
Social Security Contributions Agency	Social Security	2 April 1991
Training and Employment Agency	Northern Ireland	2 April 1990

Agency Name	Parent Department	Established
United Kingdom Passport Agency	Home Office	2 April 1991
Vehicle Certification Agency	Transport	2 April 1990
Vehicle Inspectorate[1]	Transport	1 August 1988
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	Agriculture	2 April 1990
Warren Spring Laboratory	Trade and Industry	20 April 1989
50 in Number		
Customs and Excise[4] (30 Executive Units): established April 1991	[2]	

[1] Trading Funds.
[2] Independent Government Department.
[3] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[4] Moving towards full operation on Next Steps lines following publication of Framework Documents.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The combined expenditure of the diplomatic and aid wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on management consultants in financial years 1986-87 to 1990-91 was as follows:

Year	Amount £
1986-87	68,329
1987-88	257,272
1988-89	62,512
1989-90	182,444
1990-91	115,341

Details for years earlier than 1986-87 are not available.

Budgetary provision for management consultants in 1991-92 is:

	£
Diplomatic wing	41,000
Aid wing	41,200

Chernobyl

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government currently provide to help deal with the aftermath of the 1986 nuclear explosion and fire at the Chernobyl power station; if, in the light of rising projected fatalities, he will increase the technical and medical assistance offered; whether the Government will institute a programme of treating Ukrainian children affected by radiation at United Kingdom facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our ability to offer assistance has been limited by the lack of hard information on the Chernobyl disaster. We hope that the International Atomic Energy Agency report expected soon will clarify matters and provide a basis for effective co-operation: we welcome the appointment by the UN Secretary-General of Miss Joan Anstee as the co-ordinator of UN activity. Meanwhile, we have given some practical help, for example by promoting specialist contacts.

Our reciprocal health agreement with the Soviet Union Government does allow patients from the Soviet Union to be treated here, on the basis of a formal request from the Soviet authorities. So far, they have not approached us over Chernobyl-related cases.

Iraq (Missing Journalists)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning the three British journalists, Nick Della Casa, Rosanna Della Casa, and Charles Maxwell, who have been reported as missing in Iraq since 23 March.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are in frequent contact with the families of Mr. and Mrs. Della Casa and Mr. Maxwell and have received numerous inquiries from their many friends and media colleagues, including the BBC.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action has been taken by his Department in any attempt to trace the three British journalists, Nick Della Casa, Rosanna Della Casa, and Charles Maxwell, who have been reported as missing in Iraq since 23 March;

(2) what information he has concerning the numbers of British journalists, relief workers, or civilians who have been reported as missing in Iraq since the cessation of hostilities; and what action is being taken to trace them.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since early April, our embassies in the region have been making inquiries about the missing people. We have circulated their descriptions widely, and have asked staff of the Ministry of Defence, relief organisations, British media and the International Committee of the Red Cross to report anything they hear. Iraqi representatives in London and Riyadh have been given their details and asked to check whether their authorities know of their whereabouts.

The only other British national known to be missing is a freelance journalist, Mr. Stephen Paul Kabos, last reported in Jordan. Similar inquiries have been instituted to trace him.

Council of Ministers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Internal Market Council will meet on 13 May and Ministers will continue discussion of the Commission's proposed programme of work on trans-European networks. There is a possibility of

agreement to free outstanding directives on the weights and dimensions of vehicles. Ministers may discuss a draft Directive on insurance company accounts and the second directive on diplomas.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 13-14 May. Ministers will review progress on negotiating a European Economic area with the EFTA countries and may meet their EFTA counterparts in the margins to discuss this. Ministers may consider the Commission's proposals for possible future association arrangements between the Community and its overseas countries and territories, OCTs. Ministers might discuss whether non-European states should participate in the energy charter and review EC-Japan relations including the question of Japanese car exports. Ministers will also consider a report on the possible extension of European Investment bank activities. There will also be a Ministerial session of the inter-governmental conference on political union on 13 and 14 May which will continue examination of the proposals made by the presidency.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 21 and 22 May and Ministers will discuss the 1991 agriculture price fixing proposals, the agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round, bivalve molluscs, and fish hygiene. Ministers may also discuss third country veterinary checks, health rules governing fresh meat, the marketing of EEC accepted plant protection products, milk quotas, food quality designations and organic production standards.

The Development Council will meet on the 27 May and Ministers might discuss the implementation of the pilot phase of the EC investment partners facility for Latin America, Asia and the Mediterranean and consider a Commission proposal for its continuation. Ministers are expected to adopt conclusions on the Community programme for co-financing projects in developing countries with non-governmental organisations and on the use of the counterpart funds resulting from general import programmes and food aid by the governments of developing countries. Ministers may discuss a Commission paper setting out guidelines for the Community and member states concerning the relationship between development cooperation policy, the promotion and defence of human rights, and support for the democratic process in all developing countries.

The Energy Council will meet on 31 May and Ministers are expected to adopt the gas transit directive and will give consideration to proposals on oil crises measures and contingency oil stocks, specific action for vigorous energy efficiency and hot water boilers. Minister may also discuss the proposed energy charter for the development of a pan-European free market in energy.

Diplomatic Immunity

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many serious offences were allegedly committed in 1990 by persons entitled to diplomatic immunity; and how many foreign diplomats were withdrawn from their posts in Britain in that year as a result of alleged offences.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Thirty-three alleged serious offences by persons entitled to dipomatic immunity were drawn to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1990—seven fewer than in 1989. "Serious offences" are defined in accordance with the report to the Foreign Affairs Committee "The Abuse of Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges (1985)" as offences falling into a category which would in certain circumstances attract a maximum penalty of six months or more imprisonment; we are advised that none of the alleged offences would have been likely to attract a custodial sentence. The majority involved drinking and driving and shoplifting.

Six diplomats were withdrawn from their posts in Britain in 1990 following alleged offences, as against 14 in the previous year.

Diplomatic Missions (Parking Fines)

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of unpaid parking fines incurred by each diplomatic mission in London during 1990.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information is given in the table. The table also includes those international organisations which incurred unpaid fines. The figures may be reduced by late payment.

The total for 1990—6,551—indicates a 16 per cent. reduction over the figure for 1989—7,831—and represents only 6 per cent. of the 1984 figure—108,932, the last to be published before the introduction in May 1985 of the Government's policy on parking by members of diplomatic missions.

We welcome the further reduction in unpaid parking fines that has been achieved during 1990 and appreciate the co-operation of diplomatic missions since the introduction of the parking policy. We shall continue to monitor carefully the level of unpaid fines and bring pressure to bear on diplomatic missions to reduce this still further.

Unpaid parking fines

Diplomatic mission	*1990*	*1989*
Poland	531	244
Saudi Arabia	346	287
Soviet Union	308	599
Pakistan	220	243
Kuwait	218	113
Sudan	193	238
Cameroon	191	261
United Arab Emirates	185	231
Cote d'Ivoire	183	272
Morocco	156	135
Korea	152	216
Greece	146	195
Thailand	145	134
Israel	131	166
Iraq	125	147
Federal Republic of Germany [1](FRG+DDR)	122	[1]213
India	121	79
Cyprus	110	102
Egypt	105	261
Yugoslavia	101	65
Bulgaria	101	152
France	101	94
China	92	83
Spain	89	177
Angola	86	197
Malaysia	84	142
Qatar	83	166
Hungary	82	57
Turkey	76	117
Zambia	76	46
Jordan	71	63
Yemen [1](PDRY+YAR)	71	[1]69
Nigeria	70	37

Diplomatic mission	1990	1989
Oman	70	44
Portugal	69	106
Brunei	63	118
Romania	60	34
Bangladesh	59	77
The Gambia	55	60
Sierra Leone	54	55
Brazil	51	75
Jamaica	49	23
Barbados	48	79
Algeria	46	90
Gabon	43	11
Guyana	39	28
Canada	39	74
Liberia	38	36
Uruguay	34	48
Italy	34	27
Tunisia	31	46
Czechoslovakia	30	40
Philippines	29	22
Zimbabwe	28	21
Seychelles	25	39
Tanzania	24	53
Senegal	24	22
Ethiopia	23	43
Indonesia	22	12
Japan	22	57
Mauritius	21	33
Vietnam	20	8
Chile	20	14
Cuba	20	33
Somalia	18	15
Belgium	18	27
Guatemala	18	8
Kenya	18	14
Bahrain	18	3
Zaire	18	34
Honduras	16	16
Finland	16	51
Venezuela	15	55
United States	15	14
Uganda	15	18
Norway	15	52
Myanmar	14	28
Nicaragua	13	26
Iceland	12	8
Mongolia	12	9
Lesotho	12	8
Paraguay	11	14
Lebanon	11	19
Australia	11	5
Trinidad	10	13
Austria	9	9
Togo	8	4
Luxembourg	8	1
Botswana	8	3
Malawi	8	13
Mexico	7	4
Ecuador	7	11
East Caribbean	7	2
Sri Lanka	7	3
Singapore	6	2
Sweden	6	35
Dominica	5	9
Bolivia	4	6
Panama	4	5
Benin	4	5
Denmark	3	4
Netherlands	3	4
Afghanistan	3	4
Nepal	2	5
Fiji	2	18
Peru	2	8
Tonga	2	1
Costa Rica	1	0
Grenada	1	0
Colombia	1	3
El Salvador	1	0
Malta	1	3
South Africa	1	5
Antigua and Barbuda	1	0
Ghana	0	102
Ireland	0	39
Swaziland	0	3
Switzerland	0	2
Belize	0	1
New Zealand	0	0
Mozambique	0	2
Papua New Guinea	0	1
Argentina	0	0
Bahamas	0	1
Iran	0	7
International Organisations		
Commonwealth Secretariat	49	23
Cocoa	6	5
Coffee	6	3
EC	1	0
IMO	0	4
INMARSAT	0	5
Sugar	0	0
UN	0	0
WEU	0	0
Total	6,551	7,831

Namibia

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to press the European Commission to resume the protocols with Namibia, suspended following the judgment of the Namibian High Court in respect of Spanish vessels caught illegally fishing in Namibian territorial waters.

Mrs. Chalker: This issue has already been raised in the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the Community at Brussels. We understand that the suspension of talks is only temporary and we look forward to their resumption. I shall pursue in Brussels next week.

WALES

Rail Transport Infrastructure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what responsibility he has for the rail transport infrastructure in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Rail infrastructure in Wales is the responsibility of British Rail, which operates in accordance with objectives set by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. I maintain close contact with British Rail and with my right hon. and learned Friend on all issues affecting rail services in Wales.

A548

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many times in April 1991 the A548 has been closed between Connah's quay and Queensferry;

(2) when he estimates the Shotton-Connah's quay relief road will be constructed; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the temporary closure of the A548; and what steps are being taken to alleviate the traffic jams;

(4) when he estimates that the A548 Queensferry-Connah's quay trunk road will be open to regular traffic.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The A548 is a county road. These matters are for Clwyd county council as the responsible highway authority.

Health Services (Allocation of Funds)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the funds allocated per head of population for the financial year 1991-92, for each health authority in Wales for *(a)* contractual health services they will purchase and *(b)* non-contractual health services, including emergency treatment received by patients outside their resident health authority area.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Revenue allocations to health authorities in 1991-92 are not per capita based nor have they been divided into separate allocations for contractual and non-contractual purposes. Within their overall resources, health authorities have discretion as to the amount they commit to service contracts and the amounts they set aside as contingency reserves to meet the costs of non-contractual referrals and emergencies. It is therefore not possible to provide the information in the form requested.

The 1991-92 revenue allocations represent the first step in the transitional process of moving toward a method of resource allocation to reflect authorities' new roles as purchasers of services for their resident population. They have been funded in 1991-92 on the basis of their residents' use of services—both within and outside their areas. These allocations simply translate the historical distribution of resources from one in which the money flowed direct to service providers, to one in which it flows via district of residence. Eventually, revenue resource allocations will be per capita based, but weighted using a formula taking into account factors such as age, ill health and the cost of providing services in rural areas. The transition is expected to be completed by 1998-99 when each authority will receive its formula share of funds. Details of the new weighted capitation formula and the arrangements for transition were provided in the Secretary of State's reply of 21 March to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones).

Health Authorities

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in which month he will be producing the first annual review of family health services authorities, Welsh Health Common Services Authority and Health Promotion Authority for Wales performance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Annual reviews of FHSAs, WHCSA, and HPAW performance have been conducted by our officials for some years. In 1991, the FHSA reviews will take place during October and November, and that for HPAW in October. A date for WHCSA's annual review has not yet been fixed.

Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the approved Health Promotion Authority for Wales plan.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have made arrangements to place copies in the Library of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales' plan which I launched on 4 February 1991, entitled "Plans for Action 1 the Way Forward".

Litter

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the names of the officers appointed by each local authority in Wales with responsibility for issuing £10 fixed penalty fines for dropping litter under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the number of such notices issued since 13 February.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally.

Sheep Disease

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many cases of pastrurella haemolytica have been diagnosed among newly born lambs in Wales in each year since 1980;

(2) how many cases of clostordial disease have been diagnosed among unvaccinated sheep in Wales in each year since 1980.

Mr. David Hunt: These diseases are not notifiable and no figures are available for their prevalence.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the letter my predecessor sent him on 4 April 1990, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House. Outturn in 1989-90 is £342,161 and provisional outturn in 1990-91 is £274,629. Budgets for 1991-92 have yet to be finalised.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Welsh Development Agency; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. David Hunt: This is an operational matter for the Welsh Development Agency, and I will ask the Chairman to write to the hon. Gentleman.

House Renovation Grants

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he proposes to make to the test of resources for house renovation grants; and what further guidance he intends to issue to local authorities on the provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Regulations uprating the allowances and premiums used to assess the eligibility of

applicants for house renovation grants including those to help provide facilities for disabled people came into force today. These changes are in line with the annual uprating applied to other income related benefits on which the test of resources is largely based. The Department's circular 15/91 issued to all local authorities in Wales on 18 April explains the effect of the new regulations and also gives advice on other matters relating to the implementation of the grant regime and area based renovation techniques.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of his Department.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding reply 26 April]:* The figures are as follows:

As at 1 April	*Complement*	*Staff in post*
1979(-80)	17	15
1980(-81)	17	15
1981(-82)	15	13
1982(-83)	15	13
1983(-84)	13	11
1984(-85)	15	13
1985(-86)	16	15
1986(-87)	15	14
1987(-88)	15	13
1988(-89)	15	13
1989(-90)[1]	17	14
1990(-91)	15	13
1991(-92)	[2]—	15

[1] February.
[2] Since the introduction of delegated budgeting arrangements, the formal complement is no longer the basis for staffing.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each health authority in Wales, in respect of (1) mental illness and (2) mental handicap *(a)* hospitals or wards planned for closure by 1996 for which Welsh Office approval has been given, *(b)* hospitals or wards for which approval has been sought, *(c)* hospitals or wards in respect of which closure is projected in the authority's 10-year plan and *(d)* hospitals or wards in respect of which the authority has otherwise indicated to the Welsh Office that it may seek approval to close, listing in each case the total number of beds available in each hospital or ward and the current level of occupancy.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 29 April]:* The William Nicholls home, Cardiff and Llwyn View hospital, Dolgellau are the only proposals for decommissioning with the Secretary of State at this time. The capacity of William Nicholls is 47 beds of which 36 are occupied: the relevant figures for Llwyn View are 32 and 22.

There are no hospitals or wards which have been approved for closure by 1996, which are still open.

As regards future plans, it is envisaged, under the all-Wales mental illness and mental handicap strategies, that more appropriate patterns of local services will continue to be developed over the next decade and more. As a result, some existing wards and hospitals will be closed. However, plans are under development and no further firm plans for closure are before the Secretary of State at this time.

PRIME MINISTER

VAT

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Prime Minister if he will put in hand an assessment of the comparative loss of revenue in the sale of home safety equipment free of value added tax and the costs of the treatment of victims of accidents in the home; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: An official estimate of the value added tax accruing on the sale of home safety equipment is not available. The costs of treatment for all accidents in the home are about £300 million per year. The United Kingdom is not permitted under the EC sixth VAT directive to introduce any new zero rates.

Olympic Games

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what specific steps he and the Government will be taking in support of the Manchester Olympic Committee's bid to stage the Olympic Games; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government wish Manchester every success in its attempt to bring the 2000 Olympics to Britain. My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport is ready to discuss with those concerned how best the Government can help to promote the bid.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education and Library Boards

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the level of funding to each of the five education and library boards in Northern Ireland in each financial year since 1 April 1986.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Financial allocations to education and library boards

Financial year	*Belfast £'000s*	*North Eastern £'000s*	*South Eastern £'000s*	*Southern £'000s*	*Western £'000s*	*Total £'000s*
1986-87						
Recurrent	48,566	49,382	39,220	47,744	42,834	227,746
Capital	3,773	6,541	6,063	6,439	4,875	27,691
1987-88						
Recurrent	46,882	52,395	42,617	50,394	45,821	238,109
Capital	7,179	6,373	5,788	6,139	4,717	30,196

Financial year	Belfast £'000s	North Eastern £'000s	South Eastern £'000s	Southern £'000s	Western £'000s	Total £'000s
1988-89						
Recurrent	49,301	56,277	45,976	55,063	48,857	255,474
Capital	8,539	4,519	5,961	7,039	5,328	31,386
1989-90						
Recurrent	54,367	63,229	52,332	61,435	54,874	286,237
Capital	7,212	6,976	6,767	10,966	8,326	40,247
1990-91						
Recurrent[1]	61,424	72,276	61,877	70,033	62,870	328,480
Capital	8,022	9,793	9,914	13,302	9,205	50,236
1991-92						
Recurrent[2]	Not yet available					755,848
Capital	Not yet available					50,707

[1] Estimated expenditure.
[2] Recurrent and capital expenditure allocations not yet finalised.

Lough Foyle

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the increase in the surface area of Lough Foyle at high spring tides due to the erosion of land over the last 30 years or such other period for which measurements exist, with special reference to the coastline between Magilligan point and the mouth of the River Roe.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not presently available, except at disproportionate cost.

Health Boards and Councils

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the health and social services boards and the health and social services area councils indicating in respect of each the original nominating person or body; and whether there was consultation at any stage in respect of each such member with the Government of the Irish Republic.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies given to the hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) on 15 April and 25 April 1991, *Official Report*, Vol. 189, columns *84-85* and column *528*.

It is not normal practice to disclose whether any views have been put forward on the composition of individual public bodies under article 6 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information for 1979-80 to 1983-84 is available throughout Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office only at disproportionate cost. Information for the years 1984-85 to date and the budget for 1991-92 is as follows:

	£
1984-85	2,352,311
1985-86	2,427,200
1986-87	2,742,192
1987-88	3,363,213
1988-89	4,260,116
1989-90	4,835,757
1990-91	[1]4,137,532
1991-92	[2]4,233,000

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means he proposes to change the ownership of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland; what representations he has received opposing such proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Draft legislation to effect the privatisation has been issued for consultation. The White Paper issued previously proposes that the industry's transfer to the private sector will take place in two stages; the sale of the four power stations by competitive tender followed by a flotation of the remainder of Northern Ireland Electricity's business.

I have received representations opposing privatisation from three local authorities, the trade unions and a member of the public.

I believe that the Government's proposals for privatisation will lead to a more efficient electricity industry.

ENERGY

Domestic Energy Consumption

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the percentage of domestic gas consumption which is used in space heating, refrigeration, water heating, drying and cooking, respectively.

Mr. Wakeham: An estimated breakdown of domestic gas consumption by end use for 1990 is given in the table:

End use	Percentage
Space heating	69
Water heating	22
Cooking	6
Other[1]	3

End use	Percentage
Total	100

[1] Other includes gas fridges, wash boilers, tumble driers, drying cabinets, pokers, boiling rings and lighting.
Source: Building Research Establishment.

Electricity Pylons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research his Department has commissioned or published in the last 10 years in respect of the health effects of electromagnetic radiation from electricity pylons.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Research into whether electric and magnetic fields at power frequencies—that is, 50 or 60Hz—create a hazard to human health has been going on worldwide for more than 10 years. However, the National Radiological Protection Board has advised that, to date, the findings of such research have been inconclusive.

The National Grid Company funds a substantial portion of the current research in the United Kingdom, much of which has been undertaken by independent laboratories at various universities and a teaching hospital. My Department maintains close liaison with the Department of Health, which takes the lead within government on possible hazards to health from electromagnetic fields. It does not itself commission or publish research into the health effects of electric and magnetic fields.

British Wind Energy Association

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department was represented at the annual conference of the British Wind Energy Association held at University college Swansea between 10 and 12 April.

Mr. Moynihan: Yes. One official from my Department and three from the energy technology support unit, which manages the Department's renewable energy programme, attended. Both the Department and ETSU gave papers and many of the technical papers covered work undertaken within our research and development programme. The Department was one of the sponsors of the conference and had a stand in the exhibition.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 12 March 1990, *Official Report*, at column 5.

The actual expenditure in 1989-90 and 1990-91 and the estimated expenditure in 1991-92 is in the table.

Financial year	£
1989-90	6,317
1990-91	14,683
1991-92	22,000

British Coal Board

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state the contract length of the recent appointments approved by Secretary of State to the board of British Coal; if he will list the names of the individuals; and what is their annual salary.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The names and salaries of those recently appointed to the board of British Coal are as follows:

	£
Mr. John Neil Clarke *(Chairman)*	225,000
Mr. John Henry Northard, CBE	125,000
Mr. Malcolm John Edwards, CBE	95,000
Mr. Albert Wheeler, CBE	95,000
Mr. Michael Howard Butler	90,000
Dr. Kenneth Moses, CBE	90,000
Mr. Kevan Hunt	85,000

All these appointments are for a period of two years except for Mr. Northard's, whose contract is for a year, and the chairman's, which is for a five-year period. Mr. Clarke's salary includes an element in lieu of pension since his appointment is not pensionable.

Rural Electricity Supplies

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the proposals by the chairman of the Rural Development Commission to invite the Department of Energy to consider funding a scheme of assistance for mains electricity connection for households in remote rural areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am considering the Rural Development Commission's proposals in the light of the provisions already made in the Electricity Act 1989 relating to new connections, and expect shortly to respond to the chairman.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Support

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will show the overall cost of agricultural support, national and EC, in *(a)* the United Kingdom as a percentage of gross domestic product of the United Kingdom and *(b)* the EC as a percentage of gross domestic product of the EC, for each of the years 1961, 1973 and 1990.

Mr. Curry: The information requested for the United Kingdom is as follows. I regret that the corresponding information for the EC is not readily available.

	1961-62	*1973-74*	*1990-91*
Expenditure on agricultural support (£ million)	263	392	[1]1,958
Expenditure on agricultural support as a percentage of gross domestic product	1·00	0·52	0·36

[1] Forecast.

Codex Alimentarius Commission

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his policy on the selection of United Kingdom representatives to attend meetings of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its committees.

Mr. Maclean: Codex Alimentarius Commission meetings are inter-governmental technical discussions and United Kingdom delegations to them are led by officials who have the appropriate responsibilities within Departments. Representatives from other organisations such as industry or consumer organisations are invited where appropriate to join the delegation in an advisory capacity.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: The annual costs of fees paid by the Department to management consultants, excluding computer consultants, since 1984-85 are set out in the table. Data for earlier years can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Under decentralised budgeting arrangements in MAFF, there is no central provisions for such consultancies in 1991-92 and any which are commissioned will have to be funded from the general running cost allocations of the units concerned. Decisions will therefore be taken as necessary during the year.

Financial year	*Expenditure £*
1984-85	27,110
1985-86	174,724
1986-87	135,279
1987-88	44,015
1988-89	162,114
1989-90	143,150
1990-91	129,817

Milk Marketing

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about reform of milk marketing arrangements in England.

Mr. Gummer: I welcome the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales' decision to seek an early and orderly change to more flexible and competitive milk marketing arrangements. I hope that it will continue to press ahead quickly with proposals for transforming itself to co-operative status and will now bring the dairy trade and other interested parties into its discussions.

The Government share the board's view that change is necessary, but we all agree that such change must be orderly. I must therefore emphasise that until alternative arrangements are agreed and put in place the existing milk marketing scheme continues in force. I will continue to sustain its proper and reliable operation within the present framework of European and domestic law, and will work with the board and the European Commission to prevent its being undermined by artificial contractual arrangements. The growth of such arrangements illustrates the pressures facing the statutory scheme and the need for the modalities of change to be decided quickly. They must not be a means of evading the present legislation to the detriment of the industry as a whole.

Consumer Panel

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the work of the consumer panel.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend announced on 2 November 1989, *Official Report*, Vol. 159, c. 317-18, that he was setting up the consumer panel in order to improve the dialogue between the Ministry and consumers and to allow consumers the opportunity to play a more effective role in the formulation of food policy. In the period to 31 March 1991, the panel has met five times. The minutes of its meetings and all papers submitted to it are publicly available on request and are routinely circulated to over 100 parties. Its agenda are published before each meeting. Senior officials of both MAFF and the Department of Health have attended its meetings, which I have chaired.

The panel has been anxious to examine the procedures for making sure that food is safe. It has looked at the work of five of the expert committees which assist Departments and has probed the representation of consumer interests on these committees and within MAFF. It has also discussed risk assessment and the Department of Health's food hazard warning system. Research and development has been the theme of one meeting and the panel visited MAFF's food science laboratory to see its work at first hand. The panel has emphasised the need for increased consumer education with information published in readily assimilable form; and for full weight to be given to consumer concerns. This work continues.

It has also been anxious to ensure that as much information as possible should be freely available. This has been a recurrent subject during the panel's discussions as well as being specifically discussed on one occasion. The wide availability of panel papers itself contributes to the information put into the public domain. At a meeting earlier this month, I was able to report a number of changes in procedures intended to make more information publicly available and to make access easier.

In addition, panel members have raised a number of issues causing them concern:

BSE;
food irradiation;
water quality;
the production and regulation of compound animal feeds
the handling of frozen food in retail outlets;
the use of pesticides in potato production in Northern Ireland;
the need to encourage better nutrition;
food safety enforcement standards.

In addition, the panel has discussed matters which were of current interest at the time of meetings such as, the use of cling film, food labelling, the training of food handlers and the so-called "Fourth Hurdle" initiative within the European Parliament.

At its request, the Ministry and the Department of Health have also produced brief notes summarising Departments' aims in relation to food safety.

I have consulted the panel on a number of specific issues on which a consumer input was particularly useful in determining the course to follow:

the labelling of cheese made from unpasteurised milk;
advice to consumers on the use of saccharin;
advice to consumers on the intake of vitamin A;
consumer information programmes.

I am grateful to panel members for the time they have given. Their questioning has led us to re-examine departmental practices and thinking and they have widened the range of views which go into the formulation of policy. I have found these discussions very worthwhile.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Scientific Researchers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the progress made towards modifying career opportunities for scientific researchers following the publication of the first report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee on "Science Policy: the European Dimension" in December 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This report is currently under consideration by the Government and a response will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next intends to meet representatives of the Association of Researchers in Medicine and Science Ltd. to discuss the career structures of scientific researchers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have agreed to meet representatives of this association and my officials are in touch with their representatives with a view to fixing a date.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make it his policy *(a)* to offer accreditation to scientific researchers with a proven track record and *(b)* to reallocate funding in accordance with the development of a national career structure for scientific researchers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The recruitment and career structure of scientific researchers are a matter for the employing institutions and research councils. For its part, the Government have provided substantial funding to the higher education funding councils for restructuring and new appointments of academic staff.

Salaries

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by university and polytechnic the salaries of each director, principal, rector or vice-chancellor in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No. This information is not available to the Department.

Work Placements

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what percentage of *(a)* university and *(b)* polytechnic students undertook work placements as part of their academic courses for each year since 1976;

(2) what percentage of students undertook work placements as part of their courses at *(a)* each university and *(b)* each polytechnic in the United Kingdom in each year since 1976.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information on universities is contained in the annual publication "University Statistics—Volume One—Students and Staff" published by the universities' statistical record. The numbers of students in each university and the numbers on sandwich courses for the academic years 1980-81 and 1989-90 are given in table 12. The numbers of sandwich course students in earlier years were published in "Statistics of Education—Volume 6—Universities" published by the University Grants Committee.

The above publications are available in the Library.

The numbers of students on sandwich courses in English polytechnics, as expressed as a proportion of total full-time and sandwich course enrolments, for the years 1976-77 to 1989-90 are shown in table 1 below. Data on the numbers and percentages of students on sandwich courses in each polytechnic in England for the years 1987-88 to 1989-90 are shown in table 2.

Table 1
Full-time and sandwich higher education enrolments in English[1] polytechnics (1976-89)

Academic year	*Enrolments on:* *Sandwich courses*	*All FTS courses*	*Sandwich enrolments as a percentage of all FTS enrolments*
1976-77	32,885	162,478	20
1977-78	36,004	170,248	21
1978-79	38,136	176,716	22
1979-80	40,284	178,709	23
1980-81	41,506	185,429	22
1981-82	43,061	196,128	22
1982-83	45,320	204,027	22
1983-84	47,918	215,794	22
1984-85	49,135	220,323	22
1985-86	48,604	226,799	21
1986-87[2]	49,089	233,451	21
1987-88[3]	51,654	245,529	21
1988-89[4]	53,293	257,243	21
1989-90[4]	58,248	279,324	21

[1]Totals for the years 1976-77 to 1980-81 include enrolments from the polytechnics of Wales.
[2]Data for the years up to and including 1986-87 are taken from DES Statistics of Education, Further Education Volumes.
[3]Coverage is for polytechnics within the PCFC sector as at 1 April 1989. (Totals are slightly higher than those given in Statistics of Education.)
[4]Coverage is for polytechnics within the PCFC sector as at 1 April 1990.
Source: FESR, numbers as at 1 November.

Table 2
Full-time and sandwich higher education enrolments in each English polytechnic

Enrolments	*Academic year beginning* *Sandwich*	*1987[1]* *All FTS HE*	*SW as % of all HE*	*All SW*	*1988[2]* *All HE*	*SW as % of all HE*	*All SW*	*1989[2]* *All He*	*SW as % of all HE*
Polytechnics									
Birmingham	1,564	10,239	15	1,613	10,906	15	1,835	12,480	15
Brighton	1,406	7,089	20	1,388	7,295	19	1,576	7,769	20
Bristol	1,666	10,328	16	1,709	10,397	16	1,977	11,209	18
Central London	482	8,651	6	565	12,882	4	745	13,970	5
City of London	375	7,862	5	380	8,129	5	401	7,938	5

Enrolments	Sandwich	1987[1] All FTS HE	SW as % of all HE	Academic year beginning 1988[2] All SW	All HE	SW as % of all HE	1989[2] All SW	All He	SW as % of all HE
Coventry (Lanchester)	2,671	7,304	37	2,846	8,114	35	2,876	8,381	34
East London	1,212	7,581	16	1,197	7,695	16	1,190	7,948	15
Hatfield	1,947	5,916	33	2,006	6,409	31	2,197	7,195	31
Huddersfield	2,544	7,155	36	2,595	7,355	35	2,862	8,151	35
Kingston	1,744	7,347	24	2,039	7,957	26	2,034	8,566	24
Lancashire	1,206	6,793	18	1,170	7,024	17	1,417	7,981	18
Leeds	1,395	10,268	14	1,822	10,993	17	1,781	11,621	15
Leicester	2,005	8,874	23	2,244	9,248	24	2,386	9,791	24
Liverpool	2,206	10,505	21	1,803	10,582	17	1,995	11,516	17
Manchester	2,203	15,682	14	2,228	15,732	14	2,644	17,397	15
Middlesex	2,682	8,808	30	2,788	8,931	31	3,262	9,738	33
Newcastle	1,989	10,470	19	2,162	10,989	20	2,486	11,406	22
North London	552	7,049	8	458	6,400	7	674	7,011	10
North Staffs	1,948	6,992	28	1,915	7,054	27	1,856	7,677	24
Oxford	1,126	5,992	19	1,192	6,726	18	1,265	7,138	18
Portsmouth	1,534	7,259	21	1,458	7,322	20	1,619	8,179	20
Sheffield	4,352	12,022	36	4,628	12,502	37	5,322	14,083	38
South Bank	2,218	8,986	25	2,042	9,174	22	2,208	9,650	23
South West	1,813	7,360	25	1,860	7,796	24	1,803	8,236	22
Sunderland	852	5,770	15	909	5,559	16	988	6,685	15
Teesside	1,598	5,586	29	1,640	5,578	29	1,811	6,640	27
Thames	1,556	7,783	20	1,577	7,919	20	1,647	8,572	19
Trent	4,142	11,233	37	4,317	11,475	38	4,648	12,401	37
Wolverhampton	666	7,952	8	742	9,100	8	743	10,715	7
Total	51,654	245,529	21	53,293	257,243	21	58,248	279,324	21

[1] Coverage is for polytechnics within the PCFC sector as at 1 April 1989.
[2] Coverage is for polytechnics within the PCFC sector as at 1 April 1990.

Science Teaching

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives from *(a)* Save British Science and *(b)* the National Conference of University Professors to discuss the teaching of science within the education system.

Mr. Eggar: I have not met representatives from either of these organisations to discuss the teaching of science within the education system.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

	£000
1984-85	[1]40
1985-86	18
1986-87	23
1987-88	255
1988-89	165
1989-90	377
1990-91	[2]464
1991-92	[3]259

[1] Estimated.
[2] Estimate.
[3] Budget.
Note: Information for earlier years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Music Teaching

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he will take to secure the continuity of the provision of music teaching services by local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Government have no power to direct the way in which local education authorities plan their services within the resources available to them. We do, however, attach great value to the music support services, both for their intrinsic worth and because of their potential to contribute to the delivery of music within the national curriculum.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the level of taxable income at which a 50 per cent. rate of income tax would need to be introduced in order to raise £750 million and £1,000 million, respectively.

Mr. Maude: If the tax bands proposed for 1991-92 were amended so that tax was charged at 50 per cent. on taxable income above £90,000, the additional yield of income tax for 1991-92 would be about £750 million. The corresponding level of taxable income for an additional yield of £1 billion would be £69,000. Taxable income is after deducting reliefs and allowances.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of taxpayers who have incomes below *(a)* £3,500 a year, *(b)* £4,000 a year,

(c) £4,500 a year, *(d)* £5,000 a year and *(e)* £5,500 a year, giving figures separately for individuals and married couples.

Mr. Maude: The information requested is as follows:

Estimated numbers of taxpayers 1990-91

Thousands

	Single people	*Husbands*	*Wives*
Income below			
£3,500	230	0	350
£4,000	620	0	670
£4,500	1,110	0	990
£5,000	1,520	60	1,300
£5,500	1,940	190	1,590

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on tax revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of the introduction of a reduced rate band of income tax at 23 per cent. on the first *(a)* £1,000 and *(b)* £2,000 of taxable income.

Mr. Maude: The direct revenue costs in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income are estimated to be *(a)* £500 million and *(b)* £950 million.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on tax revenues in 1992-93 and in a full year of indexing income tax personal allowances in line with earnings rather than prices, based upon current forecasts for earnings and inflation.

Mr. Maude: This will depend on real earnings growth in the period December 1990 to December 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table estimating the tax benefit of the personal use of a company car for a married man with a non-earning wife with earnings of £40,000 per annum, assuming that the car is under four years old and its original market value is £18,000, with average business mileage in 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: For a car with original market value of less than £19,250 and average business mileage, the tax due from a higher rate taxpayer on the car benefit scale charges proposed for 1991-92 are in the table.

Car engine size	*Tax (£)*
1400cc or less	820
1401 to 2000cc	1,060
2001cc or more	1,700

Income Tax

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 of introducing higher rate bands of income tax equal to 45 per cent. on taxable incomes from £30,200 to £36,700 and 50 per cent. on taxable incomes over £36,700.

Mr. Maude: The yield in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income of introducing the rates of income tax shown in the table is estimated to be about £1 billion.

Taxable income £	*Rate percentage*
1 to 23,700	25
23,700 to 30,200	40
30,200 to 36,700	45
36,700 and over	50

Taxable income is income subject to tax from all sources after deducting allowances and reliefs. The estimate does not take account of the consequential effect on capital gains tax nor does it allow for any behavioural effects that might result from such an increase.

Married Couple's Allowance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on tax revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of allowing all married couples to split the married couple's allowance between them as they choose.

Mr. Maude: About £10 million in a full year at 1991-92 income levels.

Investment Income

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of introducing a 9 per cent. surcharge on the investment income of non-pensioners, subject to a £3,000 exemption.

Mr. Maude: Such a surcharge of 9 per cent. on the investment income of individuals aged under 65 would yield about £950 million in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income.

Tax Revenue Ready Reckoner

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the tax revenue ready reckoner published in the 1990 autumn statement in the light of Budget changes.

Mr. Maude: Updated estimates are given in the table.

Direct effects of illustrative changes in Income Tax and Corporation Tax[1]

£ million cost/yield

	Cost/yield in 1991-92	*Cost/yield in 1992-93*
Income Tax		
Rates		
Change basic rate by 1p[2]	1,900	2,000
Change higher rate by 1p	180	325
Allowances		
Change personal allowance by £100	480	635
Change age-related personal allowances[3] by £100	41	60
Change married couples allowance by £100[4]	220	290
Change age-related married couples allowances[3] by £100	19	25

	£ million cost/yield	
	Cost/yield in 1991-92	Cost/yield in 1992-93
Change aged income limit by £200	2	4
Change all main allowances by 1 per cent.[5]	200	280
Change all main allowances by 10 per cent.[5]		
increase (cost)	2,000	2,750
decrease (yield)	2,075	2,850
Basic rate limit		
Change basic rate limit by 1 per cent.	30	55
Change basic rate limit by 10 per cent.		
increase (cost)	290	505
decrease (yield)	355	615
Allowances and basic rate limit		
Change all main allowances and basic rate limit by 1 per cent.[5]	235	330
Change all main allowances and basic rate limit by 10 per cent.[5]		
increase (cost)	2,275	3,225
decrease (yield)	2,450	3,500
Corporation Tax[6]		
Change full rate by 1 percentage point	380	480
Change small companies rate by 1 percentage point[7]	40	60

[1] The estimated revenue effects of changes in the basic rate of income tax in the main allowances of 10 per cent. are rounded to the nearest £25 million; other effects over £50 million are rounded to the nearest £5 million; effects of less than £50 million are rerounded to the nearest £1 million. The extent of rounding reflects the desire to avoid undue compounding of its effects when numbers are pro-rated, rather than the accuracy of the estimates. The figures for income tax changes include consequential effects on the yield of capital gains tax. Changes are assumed to take effect from April 1991.
[2] Including the effect of the change on receipts of advance corporation tax and on consequent liability to mainstream corporation tax.
[3] Allowances for those aged 65-74 and those aged 75 and over.
[4] Figures include revenue effects of changing additional personal allowance and widow's bereavement allowance by £100.
[5] Percentage changes are calculated with reference to 1990-91 levels.
[6] Assessment to corporation tax normally related to the preceding year. These estimates are, therefore, the changes to revenue that would occur if the changed rates were applied to incomes from 1 April 1990.
[7] These figures ignore effects arising from the imputation system.

Shareholders

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the change in the number of shareholders since 1979.

Mr. Maude: The latest Treasury and stock exchange survey carried out in January and February 1991 shows that 25 per cent. of the adult population (over 11 million) now own shares compared with an estimate of 7 per cent. of the adult population owning shares in 1979.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees by Her Majesty's Treasury to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: For 1979-80 and each ensuing year up to 1988-89, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 March 1990 at column 277, by my hon. Friend the then Economic Secretary. The fees paid in 1989-90 were £2,778,613, in 1990-91 fees paid amounted to £2,715,831, and the budget for 1991-92 is £3,587,516.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to remove value added tax from sales of contact lenses and spectacles.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No. This would be contrary to EC law.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those items which are currently subject to a 17·5 per cent. rate of VAT which were historically subject to the 25 per cent. purchase tax levy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A list of the principal goods subject to purchase tax at 25 per cent. (all of which now attract VAT at 17·5 per cent.) can be found in the 64th annual report of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for the year ending 31 March 1973, pages 120 and 121. A copy is available in the House of Commons library.

Customs and Excise (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The available information on the numbers of staff in the tariff and statistical office of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is shown in the following schedule. In addition, one statistician, supported by two administrative staff, is employed in the budget and central unit. I regret that detailed historical figures on the latter are not available.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise tariff and statistical office
Complement (Comp.) and substantive staff-in-post (SIP) as at 1 April

	1991-92		1990-91		1989-90		1988-89		1987-88		1986-87		1985-86		1984-85		1983-84		1982-83		1981-82		1980-81		1979-80	
	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP	Comp.	SIP
Administrative Grades																										
Grade 5			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1												
Grade 6	2	2	1	1											1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 7	6	5	6	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
SEO	15	15	14	11	10	9	10	9	10	9	11	10	11	11	11	11	11	10	13	12	14	14	15	14	14	13
HEO	36	36	34	30	22	21	22	17	22	18	24	22	28	28	28	26	30	27	31	30	31	28	32	32	37	34
EO	93	93	99	77	83	71	86	78	87	89	89	89	104	98	106	106	128	117	134	135	134	106	118	98	144	118
AO	175	153.5	174	174	184	170	187	192	193	190	204	203	207	196	217	215	220	225	276	285	340	338	396	386	434	419
AA	200	198	202	202.5	213	213	205	230	209	206	228	217	146	126	148	142	148	141	170	167	137	148	197	196	232	258
SM 3							1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
SGB 1	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
SGB 2	12	13	12	14	12	13	12	9	14	7	14	11	14	13	17	17	17	14	17	14	17	17	17	17	17	17
PS	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Typist	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Sub Total	544	520.5	548	517.5	532	502	531	543	545	529	580	562	520	482	537	527	565	544	651	652	683	660	785	753	887	868
Statistical Grades																										
Chief Statistician	1	1													1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 6 Statistician			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1												
Statistician	2	1	2		1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Senior Assistant Statistician	2	3	3	1	1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1		1		1		1	
Assistant Statistician																				1		1				
Sub Total	5	5	6	2	3	2	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
Grand Total	549	525.5	554	519.5	535	504	535	546	549	533	584	566	524	486	541	531	569	547	655	656	687	664	789	756	891	871

Note: With effect from 1986-87 the AO and AA figures include SDPs and DPs respectively.

Earnings (Taxation)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for 1991-92 those ranges of earnings within which the burden of income tax plus national insurance is less than in 1978-79.

Mr. Maude: The burden of income tax plus national insurance will be less in 1991-92 than it was in 1978-79 at all levels of real earnings.

Death Duties

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 and in a full year of the provision whereby a will may be rewritten after death to minimise tax liability to the estate.

Mr. Maude: Information is not available on which to base an estimate of the total cost to the Exchequer. The cost in 1991-92 for those cases in which property is redirected by an instrument of variation from a tax-paying beneficiary to a surviving spouse, or to a charity or heritage is about £30 million.

Medical Insurance (Tax Relief)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast for the cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 and in a full year of tax relief for private medical insurance premiums for persons aged over 60 years.

Mr. Maude: The direct revenue cost in respect of tax liabilities for 1991-92 is estimated to be about £60 million.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of replacing inheritance tax with an indexed regime of capital transfer tax on the same basis as that which preceded the 1986 Budget.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that replacing inheritance tax with an indexed 1985-86 regime of capital transfer tax would increase Government revenues by:

	£ million
In 1991-92	260
In a full year	710

These estimates are based on the estimated value of taxable estates passing on death in 1991-92 under existing rules and make no allowance for any impact which the indexed 1985-86 regime would have on the level of taxable estates. It has not been possible to estimate the effect of the different ways in which lifetime transfers are taxed under the two regimes.

Uncollected Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing, for 1989-90 or the most recent available estimate, the amount of tax which remained uncollected by the Inland Revenue at the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* These figures are produced for the Inland Revenue's accounting year, to 31 October, rather than on a fiscal year basis.

The Inland Revenue's provisional figure for the amount of tax which remained uncollected at the end of October 1990 is £6·1 billion.

All but a small proportion of the tax uncollected at the end of each account is subsequently collected, much of it with interest added.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast for the number of individuals who will be liable to capital gains tax at the higher rate in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Current estimates of the number of capital gains taxpayers on disposals made in 1990-91 and 1991-92 are 100,000 and 120,000 respectively. Of these figures, about 60 per cent. in both years are estimated to be individuals paying capital gains tax at the higher rate of 40 per cent. on at least part of their taxed gains.

Unleaded Fuel

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest figures for the percentage of unleaded fuel deliveries to garage forecourts.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* At 14 April 1991, 40·27 per cent. of deliveries to garage forecourts were of unleaded petrol.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of reducing the investment limit for all new personal equity plans to £3,000;

(2) if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 of personal equity plans, giving separately figures for relief at the higher and basic rates of tax.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The cost of income tax relief of personal equity plans is estimated as £45 million in 1991-92. The cost in 1991-92 will depend on take-up. Separate figures for higher rate and basic rate relief are not available.

If the investment limit for new personal equity plans had been limited to £3,000 in 1990-91, the cost would have been lower by about £3 million in that year.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a table showing the yield of restricting (i) the personal tax allowance, (ii) the married couple's allowance, (iii) the age allowances and (iv) the major tax reliefs to the basic rate of tax in 1991-92;

(2) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 of limiting all tax reliefs and allowances, apart from personal allowances, to the basic rate of tax, where available giving separate figures for different reliefs.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The latest estimates of the direct revenue yields in a full year with the proposed 1991-92 levels of allowances and tax rates are as follows:

	£ million
Personal tax allowances (excluding married couples allowance)	980
Married couple's allowance	340
Age allowances[1]	Nil
Relief on contributions to personal pensions[2]	[3]150
Relief on employee's contributions to occupational pension schemes	250

[1] The higher levels of the age-related personal and married couple's allowances given to those aged 65 and over subject to the income limit.

[2] Including relief for retirement annuity premia and free standing additional voluntary contributions.

[3] This estimate is subject to a wide margin of error.

The direct revenue yield from restricting all reliefs and allowances to the basic rate is likely to be of the order of £2,200 million, somewhat more than the sums of the yields from restricting the reliefs and allowances separately; this is due to the cumulative effect of bringing more people into higher rate tax. No account has been taken of possible behavioural changes resulting from such a restriction.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many additional individuals would be liable to income tax at the higher rate in 1991-92 if all reliefs and allowances, apart from personal tax allowances, were limited to the basic rate of tax.

Mr. Maude: About 200,000 additional individuals would be liable to income tax at the higher rate compared with the number so liable under the Budget proposals.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications Equipment

10. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the value of British exports of telecommunications and radio equipment in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury: British exports of telecommunications and radio equipment as defined by division 76 of the standard international trade classification were £2,223 million in 1989 and £2,687 million in 1990, an increase of 21 per cent.

Source: Division 76 of the Standard International Trade Classification.

Manufacturing Output

16. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output.

Mr. Redwood: Manufacturing industry will benefit from the reduction in inflation and from the Government's policies to create a climate in which enterprise and wealth creation can flourish, especially through lower business taxation and market opening measures.

Recession

19. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has recently received from British industry about the recession.

Mr. Lilley: I continue to receive representations from British industry supporting the Government's determination to defeat inflation, thereby creating the conditions for a resumption of sustainable economic growth.

28. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the CBI to discuss the recession in industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: I expect to meet Sir Brian Corby, president of the CBI, on 15 May 1991.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the Retail Consortium to discuss the effect of the recession in industry.

Mr. Lilley: I am next due to meet the Retail Consortium in July when I expect a wide range of matters to be discussed. Ministerial colleagues in the Department have also met the consortium in recent weeks.

Kuwait

20. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what prospects for trade with Kuwait he has identified; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: There are significant opportunities for British exporters in a wide variety of areas in Kuwait, including repair and refurbishment of damaged buildings and infrastructure, the restocking of the distribution system with industrial and consumer items of all kinds, and in the effort to extinguish the burning oil wells and restore oil production.

My Department will continue to do all that it can to assist British companies to secure a substantial share of this business.

Short-Termism

22. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to tackle short-termism in British industry.

Mr. Lilley: My views were set out in a speech to the international stock exchange at the Queen Elizabeth II centre on 24 October 1990, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Multi-Fibre Arrangement

23. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress being made to continue the provisions of the multi-fibre arrangement pending resolution of the GATT negotiations.

Mr. Sainsbury: The future of the multi-fibre arrangement pending the conclusion of the Uruguay round is to be addressed by a meeting of the textiles committee in Geneva scheduled for 16 May. The Community has recently begun to discuss the mandate which will guide the Commission in that negotiation.

Holidaymakers (Protection)

24. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further protection he is considering giving holidaymakers who pay deposits or full payments in advance of receiving their holiday.

Mr. Leigh: I am currently giving urgent consideration to this matter in the context of the EC package holiday directive, which must be implemented by 31 December 1992. The directive requires, among other things, all tour organisers and/or retailers to show sufficient evidence of security for the refund of consumers' money in the event of insolvency. My Department will be consulting shortly about our proposals for implementing the directive.

Steel Industry (Scotland)

25. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the chairman of the British Steel Corporation to discuss the company's plans for its Scottish plants.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of British Steel on 7 September 1990. Their discussions were confidential.

29. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to meet the chairman and chief executive of British Steel to discuss the future of steel making in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) in the House earlier today.

Weapons Materials (Export)

26. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new initiatives he plans to control the export of materials and equipment from Britain that could be used in the manufacture of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Mr. Sainsbury: We continue to work with other like-minded countries to take effective action to prevent the proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Controls on the export of sensitive materials for use for these purposes are kept under continuous review.

Brewing

27. **Mr. Crowther:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the effect on public house rents of the implementation of the Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order 1989.

Mr. Redwood: I have received a large number of representations from pub tenants' associations, individual tenants and Members of Parliament about the effect on public house rents of the Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order and other measures introduced by the Government in response to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of beer. I recognise that some of the new types of leases being offered by the national brewers may involve higher rents; however, they also offer much greater security of tenure and can provide higher financial rewards as they offer tenants more freedom of choice. The level of rent for individual premises is a matter for commercial negotiation between the brewers and their tenants.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives from the National Licensed Victuallers Association to discuss the level of concentration in the brewing industry and non-beer ties between the licensee and the breweries.

Mr. Redwood: I am in regular contact with the National Licensed Victuallers Association. My last meeting with the association was on 9 January this year, when we discussed a range of issues relating to the brewing industry.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to ensure that

breweries cannot unilaterally extend the scope of their ties with licensees to cover brands not covered at the date when agreements took effect,

Mr. Redwood: Concern about this issue should be made known to the Director General of Fair Trading, who has been given responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the measures that the Government have introduced following the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the supply of beer. The director general will also be able to take such concerns into account when he carries out his review of the industry in late 1993 to early 1994.

Telecommunications Policy

30. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what market response there has been to his statement on telecommunications policy.

Mr. Lilley: Firms have responded positively to the Government's proposals further to liberalise the United Kingdom telecommunications market. A number of firms have expressed their intention to apply for licences to provide significant new telecommunications services, but have not as yet submitted a formal application. Details of applications will shortly be placed on a register for public inspection at the Office of Telecommunications.

Citizens Charter

31. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in establishing a citizens' charter for public services.

Mr. Lilley: The revised objectives for my Department which I announced earlier this week commit us to provide a professional, high-quality, accessible and responsive service to business and the community. The executive agencies which cover more than half the staff in the DTI have already been set demanding quality of service targets and we shall be extending this approach wherever possible throughout the Department. Following privatisation and the efforts of OFTEL the quality of telecommunications services is already greatly improved and will improve further as a result of the changes that I announced on 5 March. I attach high priority to the scope for improving the quality of postal services for business and the citizen.

Consumer Products (Safety)

32. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to meet trading standards officers to discuss the safety of consumer products.

Mr. Leigh: I have met trading standards officers and members of their representative organisations on several occasions at which safety of consumer products was one of the issues discussed. Officials of my Department keep in regular contact with trading standards officers.

Trade Balance

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will show the crude balance of imports and exports of *(a)* agriculture overall, *(b)* cereals and *(c)* the rest of the non-oil, non-visible trade for the United Kingdom, the European Economic Community, the United States of America, Canada and the Cairns group countries in 1979, 1984 and 1989.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information is in the table. Figures for 1979 are not available.

Crude trade balances in US$ millions

	Agriculture		*Cereals*		*Total visibles excluding oil and agriculture*	
	1984	*1989*	*1984*	*1989*	*1984*	*1989*
United Kingdom	−6,828	−9,002	301	197	−13,507	−37,710
United States of America	16,646	19,082	15,647	14,702	−92,056	−100,869
Canada	3,461	1,371	4,272	2,756	8,305	−242
European Community (12)	−15,244	−11,496	920	3,219	55,707	20,508
Cairns Group	39,566	42,471	8,431	7,253	−5,691	[1] −18,523

[1] Estimated.

Note:

The trade balances for the European Community and Cairns Group include intra trade.

Source:

United Nations FAO Handbook.
United Nations Handbook of Trade and Development Statistics.
United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: I refer to the answer which my hon. Friend the former Under-Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 13 March 1990, at column *173*, which covered the years 1979 to 1989. The outturn and provisional outturn figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 respectively are given in the table:

	£'000
1989-90	3,168
1990-91	[1]2,771

[1] Provisional.

The budget for management consultancy for 1991-92 has not yet been finalised. These figures do not include fees paid by DTI agencies operating on a net running costs regime.

Defence Exhibition, Birmingham

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the officials from his Department who will be attending the defence component and equipment exhibition at the national exhibition centre, Birmingham, from 14 to 16 May.

Mr. Sainsbury: A number of officials from my Department will be attending the exhibition as part of the normal course of their duties.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance the organisers of the defence component and equipment exhibition, due to commence at Birmingham on 14 May, have received from his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: None, apart from a free entry in the booklet "Trade Fairs in Britain 1991" published jointly by my Department, the British Tourist Authority and the Exhibition Industry Federation. This booklet is circulated widely overseas with a view to attracting overseas buyers to United Kingdom trade fairs.

British Telecom

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Telecom to discuss consumer matters.

Mr. Lilley: I have no immediate plans for such a discussion. I do, however, meet the chairman of British Telecom from time to time to discuss a wide range of issues.

Regional Policy

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to propose any new initiatives in the field of regional policy.

Mr. Leigh: No. The Government remain committed to an effective regional policy and we have a range of measures which recognise the special needs of the assisted areas.

ECGD (Short-term Business)

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responses he has received to the invitation to tender for the short-term business of the ECGD announced on 5 March.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government yesterday received responses to the invitation to tender from three companies previously shortlisted to tender for the short-term business of ECGD. The companies are: Assicurazioni Generali, NCM and Trade Indemnity.

There will now be a period of evaluation by the Government and their advisors, with a view to proceeding as quickly as practicable with the sale of the short-term business, subject to the successful passage of the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill through Parliament. Commitment to, and understanding of, the business as well as the financial robustness of the proposed purchaser and the price offered will be among the factors to be taken into account. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reserves the right to reject any, or all, of the responses and normal competition legislation and procedures will apply to the sale.

Cornish Tin Mining

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department had any discussions with Carnon Holdings about the effect of the withdrawal of his Department's funds for tin mining on the terms and conditions, including redundancy payments and pension rights, of employees of the company in the consequent run-down and closure of the company's tin mining operations.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* The content of the numerous discussions with Carnon Holdings Ltd is confidential. The terms and conditions of employment in Carnon, including redundancy payments and pension rights, are a matter for the company.

ENVIRONMENT

Urban Programme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) Burnley, (ii) Coventry, (iii) Derby, (iv) Doncaster, (v) Dudley and (vi) the London borough of Greenwich; and what was the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (1) ethnic minority projects, (2) projects relating to disability, (3) economic developments, and (4) the environment.

Mr. Portillo: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) Kirklees, (ii) Knowsley, (iii) Langbaurgh-on-Tees, (iv) Leeds, (v) Leicester and (vii) Lewisham London borough; and what is the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (1) ethnic minority projects, (2) projects relating to disability, (3) economic developments and (4) the environment.

Mr. Portillo: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) Rochdale, (ii) Rotherham, (iii) St. Helens, (iv) Sandwell, (v) Sefton and (vi) Sheffield; and what is the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (1) ethnic minority projects, (2) projects relating to disability, (3) economic developments and (4) the environment.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) Middlesbrough, (ii) the London borough of Newham, (iii) Nottingham, (iv) Oldham, (v) Plymouth

and (vi) Preston; and if he will indicate the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (1) ethnic minority projects, (2) projects relating to disability, (3) economic developments and (4) the environment.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 19 April 1991]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) Halton, (ii) Hammersmith, (iii) Haringey, (iv) Hartlepool, (v) Kensington and Chelsea and (vi) Kingston upon Hull; and what was the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (1) ethnic minority projects, (2) projects relating to disability, (3) economic developments and (4) the environment.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) Wandsworth London borough, (ii) Wigan, (iii) Wirral, (iv) Wolverhampton and (v) The Wrekin; and what is the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (i) ethnic minority projects, (ii) projects relating to disability, (iii) economic developments and (iv) the environment.

Mr. Portillo: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the number of projects not approved for the 1991-92 financial year *(a)* numerically and *(b)* by cash value for the urban programme in (i) South Tyneside, (ii) Southwark London borough, (iii) Stockton-on-Tees, (iv) Sunderland, (v) Tower Hamlets London borough and (vi) Walsall; and what is the percentage of projects not approved for the financial year 1991-92 relating to (1) ethnic projects, (2) projects relating to disability, (3) economic developments and (4) the environment.

Mr. Key: I will write to the hon. Member.

Water Consumption

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the annual consumption of water for industrial, agricultural, and domestic purposes for the past decade; what is the average annual capacity, from all sources, of water reserves in the United Kingdom; and what forecasts there are for future water consumption in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: The information that is held centrally is published annually for the Government statistical service in the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics". The National Rivers Authority's March 1991 report "Demands and Resources of Water Undertakers in England and Wales" is also relevant. Both documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

Conifers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make a statement pursuant to his Department's consultation letter of 15 June 1990 entitled "Conifer Planting in the English Uplands-Industrial Pennines."

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on 23 April. *[Official Report,* columns *390-91].*

Unfit Dwellings

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table of the most recent available data showing the number of unfit dwellings in each local authority area in England in the categories *(a)* unfit local authority properties, *(b)* unfit housing association properties, *(c)* unfit public sector properties, other than local authority owned, and *(d)* unfit private sector properties, other than housing association owned.

Sir George Young: Local authorities report the number of unfit dwellings in their own stock, and estimates of those owned by other public sector bodies, housing association, and privately owned in their annual housing investment programme returns, HIP1. The available figures for 1 April 1990 appear in "1990 HIP1 All Items Print", columns A31, A32, A33, and A34 respectively a copy of which is in the Library.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine: For the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 I refer the hon. Member to the reply he was given on 13 March 1989, *Official Report* columns *91-92.* Following is the information relating to 1988-89 onwards:

	£ million
1988-89	[1]9·5
1989-90	16·3
1990-91	[2]10·0
1991-92	[3]8·3

[1] Final outturn.
[2] Provisional outturn.
[3] Provisional budget.

The 1991-92 figure excludes PSA services, because its budget has yet to be finalised.

Archaeological Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he intends to take to ensure the continued provision of an effective archaeological service to the capital.

Sir George Young: The Department of the Environment's strategy for handling archaeology within the planning system is detailed in the recently published planning policy guidance note 16 "Archaeology and Planning". It describes the role of English Heritage, in advising local planning authorities in London and the

important part it plays in protecting important archaeological remains. English Heritage has announced measures to strengthen existing arrangements for providing planning advice to the London boroughs. In addition, the Museum of London has recently announced new arrangements which will enable it to continue to provide a valuable archaeological service, particularly to developers.

I am confident that the strengthened service which English Heritage will provide and the complementary service to be provided by the Museum of London will ensure that an effective archaeological service is provided to the capital.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with English Heritage about its plans to withdraw funding from the Museum of London's archaeological service from April 1991.

Sir George Young: I am aware of the discussions which have taken place between English Heritage, and the Museum of London about English Heritage's proposals to change the method of funding the museum's archaeological services. English Heritage intends to convert the establishment grants presently paid to the museum to project funding in line with the project based system of archaeological funding which exists throughout the rest of the country. The conversion of the establishment grants to project funding will take place gradually over a four year period, 1991-95, and English Heritage has offered flexibility in funding during this period to help with any immediate difficulties. English Heritage has indicated to the museum that it anticipates providing funding in excess of £1 million in 1991-92 and approximately £1 million in 1992-93 and 1993-94. These new funding arrangements are designed to provide better value for money from public funds spent on archaeology and to provide continued support for the museum of London's work on archaeology.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with English Heritage about its plans to set up an in-house archaeological town planning advice service; and whether English Heritage has sought any additional funding to cover the cost of setting up this service.

Sir George Young: I have been kept informed about the plans of English Heritage to strengthen the provision of archaeological advice which it provides to London boroughs and which reflect the approach which operates very successfully in other parts of the country. English Heritage is continuing discussions with the London boroughs, the museum of London and other interested parties about the operation of the proposed new arrangements.

English Heritage has not sought any additional Government funding in respect of the proposed new arrangements.

Countryside Commission (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Countryside Commission; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Trippier: There are no statistical divisions or designated statistical posts in the Countryside Commission.

Nature Conservancy Council (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Nature Conservancy Council; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Trippier: There were no statistical divisions in the Nature Conservancy Council nor are there any in the Nature Conservancy Council for England.

Ordnance Survey (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Ordnance Survey; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Baldry: The Ordance Survey has no statistical divisions in its organisation, nor does it employ statisticians.

Branch Hill, Hampstead

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in respect of the proposed development at Branch hill, Hampstead; and if he will call in the various proposals for his determination.

Sir George Young: Some 70 representations have been received from local residents last year and a few this year. An article 14 direction was placed on the site on 10 January 1990 requiring Camden to refer any proposals to the Secretary of State should it be minded to deem itself planning permission. This direction remains in force. Consideration will be given to calling-in the proposals should the council decide to deem itself planning permission.

Home Renovation Grants

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he proposes to make to the test of resources for house renovation grants; and what further guidance is to be given to local authorities on the provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Yeo: Regulations uprating the allowances and premiums used to assess the eligibility of applicants for house renovation grants, including those to help provide facilities for disabled people, came into force today. These changes are in line with the annual uprating applied to

other income related benefits on which the test of resources is based. Departmental circular 5/91, which was published on 24 April, explains the effect of the new regulations and gives advice on other matters relating to the implementation of parts VII and VIII of the 1989 Act.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution (Report)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the annual report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution for 1989-90.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution published its third annual report covering 1989-90 yesterday. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 30 April]:* The total sums paid out by my Department in fees to outside organisations for work resulting in privatisation since 1986-87 are shown below. My Department made no such payments in the years 1979-80 to 1985-86. The costs of the proposed privatisation of PSA services, including fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sale is completed and are not included here.

Year	*£ million*
1986-87	[1]1·1
1987-88	[1]0·6
1988-89	[1]5·1
1989-90	133·8
1990-91	9·4
1991-92	[2]4·5

[1] Figures for these three years include expenditure on behalf of the Welsh Office which was not accounted for separately.
[2] Estimated.

Biscombe's Lane, Callington

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment following the interim reply of the former Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), of 7 September 1990, to the initial approach of the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East in August 1990 and the subsequent letters of the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East on 25 October 1990, 6 November 1990 and 11 February, when he expects to provide a considered reply to the issue of the value of Biscombe's lane, Callington.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State has done so today.

Local Authority Housing

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the difference between the target and the actual management and maintenance allowances set for the London borough of Southwark for 1991-92;

(2) what is the level of the total target management and maintenance allowance for the London borough of Southwark's housing revenue account for 1991-92;

(3) what is the actual figure per property for the London borough of Southwark's management and maintenance allowance for 1991-92;

(4) what is the level of the total management and maintenance allowance set for the London borough of Southwark's housing revenue account for 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* For any local housing authority, the allowance made in housing revenue account subsidy for management and maintenance in 1991-92 is determined partly by reference to a score that compares one authority's needs with another and partly by reference to their allowance for the previous year. By this means we are progressively introducing a redistribution, or targeting, of subsidy.

Final figures will depend upon statistics collected at the end of the financial year. The London borough of Southwark estimates that for 1991-92:

(i) the allowance per dwelling would be £1,286·46 if calculated solely by reference to relative scores (£73,328,220 in total)
(ii) the actual allowance per dwelling will be £1,051·27 (£59,922,380 in total), so that
(iii) the difference would be £235·19 per dwelling (£13,405,840 in total).

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the target and *(b)* the actual management and maintenance allowances per dwelling set for each of the inner London boroughs' housing revenue accounts for 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:*

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy 1991-92—M&M Allowances

	Target allowance per dwelling if calculated solely by relative scores	*Actual allowance per dwelling after allowing for damping of redistribution*
City of London	2,149·87	2,365·30
Camden	1,950·33	1,565·72
Newham	1,232·32	992·14
Hackney	1,459·12	1,200·02
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	—
Islington	1,572·98	1,087·47
Kensington and Chelsea	1,574·10	1,546·49
Lambeth	1,514·96	1,374·47
Lewisham	1,284·00	1,117·39
Southwark	1,286·46	1,051·27
Tower Hamlets	1,370·62	1,451·23
Wandsworth	1,394·51	1,197·93
Westminster	1,774·54	1,735·60

The above data were taken from subsidy claims for 1991-92 submitted by local authorities. The London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham has yet to submit a claim.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the supervision and management element of the target management and maintenance allowance will be based on calculated need rather than on past spend; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to consult local authorities and their associations later this year on extending the system of targeted management and maintenance allowances to include the supervision and management component from next year.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the recommended figure per dwelling for the London borough of Southwark's management and maintenance allowance contained in his Department's research document "The Appraisal of Local Authority Housing".

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Although the system of targeting the maintenance component of housing revenue account subsidy management and maintenance allowance was based on results of a survey undertaken in 1987-88 into the condition of local authority stock, set out in the appraisal of local authority housing, the results were not specific to any one authority.

Press and Public Relations (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, in the press and public relations office of his Department.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* The staff in post and complement figures for the information directorate since 1 April 1989 are as follows:

	Staff in post	*Complement*
1 April 1989	47	47
1 April 1990	43	49
1 April 1991	45	48
1 April 1992	..	[1]48

[1] Provisional only.

Before 1989, the information directorate of this Department was part of the common services of DOE and the Department of Transport and separate figures for the resources for each Department are not available. Global information for this period is published each year in the form of a management information system for ministers MINIS dating back to 1979 and is available in the House of Commons Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Chainsaws

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the date when a requirement was made that students of sculpture working in wood required a recognised chainsaw certificate.

Mr. Forth: I am not aware of any such requirement. However, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires that employers must ensure that anyone who uses chainsaws or other dangerous machinery, including students in an educational establishment, should first receive appropriate training and instruction. Where necessary Health and Safety Executive inspectors enforce this requirement at visits to workplaces, including educational establishments.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information his Department holds on the number and nature of accidents through the use of chainsaws over each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Forth: Information on the number of injuries caused by persons coming into contact with a chainsaw is in table 1. This information relates to injuries reported to the Health and Safety Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 for the period 1986-87 to 1989-90. Such injuries were not separately identified in the Health and Safety Executive's database before 1986-87.

Details of the nature of such injuries in 1989-90 are in table 2.

Table 1

Injuries resulting from coming into contact with a chainsaw as reported to HSE's factory and agricultural inspectorates from 1986-87 to 1989-90[1]

Severity of injury	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[2]
Fatal	—	—	—	—
Major injury	9	14	10	7
Injury resulting in over three days off work	60	60	78	67
Total	69	74	88	74

Table 2

Injuries resulting from coming into contact with a chainsaw as reported to HSE's factory and agricultural inspectorates, 1989-90[2]

Nature of injury and site of injury[3]	*Severity of injury*			
	Fatal	*Major injury*	*Over three days off work*	*Total*
Amputation				
Finger	—	1	—	1
Fracture				
Several locations	—	1	—	1
Laceration				
Total head	—	1	7	8
Total upper limbs	—	2	16	18
Total lower limbs	—	1	29	30
Contusion				
Total torso	—	—	1	1
Total upper limbs	—	—	1	1
Total lower limbs	—	—	1	1
Superficial				
Total head	—	—	1	1
Total torso	—	—	1	1
Total upper limbs	—	—	5	5
Total lower limbs	—	1	5	6
Total	—	7	67	74

[1] Years commencing 1 April.
[2] Provisional figures.
[3] Total head—includes injuries to the eye, ear, face, head.
Total torso—includes injuries to the neck, back and trunk.
Total upper limbs—includes injuries to finger(s), hand, wrist and rest of upper limb.
Total lower limbs—includes injuries to toe(s), foot, ankle and rest of lower limb.

Footnote: Injuries reported to the Factory and Agricultural Inspectorates cover the following sectors: manufacturing, construction, agriculture and forestry, education and some service and leisure activities.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson: Expenditure on management consultancy in the Employment Department group in each year from 1984-85 to 1988-89 was as follows:

	£ thousands
1984-85	365
1985-86	365
1986-87	1,032
1987-88	653
1988-89	998
1989-90	1,482

The estimated outturn for 1990-91 is around £1,727,000. The budget for 1991-92 will be reported to Parliament in the usual way.

Information for 1979-80 to 1983-84 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Businesses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many small businesses were started up in the last year; how many were closed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The best available guide to trends in numbers of businesses comes from VAT data. Early indications are that there was a net increase of around 800 a week in 1990 in the number of businesses registered for VAT. While rather slower than the record rate of increase in 1989, this was nevertheless greater than the average rate of increase during the 1980s.

Enterprise Training

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of funding to enterprise training in each year since 1 April 1987.

Mr. Forth: The Department of Employment has supported a number of enterprise programmes over the years in question. Expenditure on these was:

	£ million
1987-88	249
1988-89	257
1989-90	262

The estimated outturn for 1990-91 is £283 million. This information can be obtained from the Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94 (Cm. 1506), which can be found in the Library.

British Tourist Authority

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the British tourist authority; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Forth: These matters are the responsibility of the board of the British tourist authority and I am asking the chairman to write directly to the hon. Gentleman.

HIV Testing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on how many companies are imposing compulsory HIV testing of their employees; and whether this practice is consistent with the guidelines of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Forth: I am not aware that a significant number of employers carry out HIV testing of employees or potential recruits. Most employers follow the advice given in "AIDS and the Workplace", jointly published by my Department and the Health and Safety Executive last year, that in all ordinary workplace activities the risks of transmission of the virus are negligible and infected individuals do not pose a risk to colleagues, customers or the public. HIV infection does not automatically make someone unfit for work and testing employees and recruits for HIV antibodies is unnecessary. In the case of existing employees, compulsory tests are unlikely to be admissible under most existing contracts of employment.

HEALTH

Electro-magnetic Radiation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned or published in the past 10 years in respect of the health effects of electro-magnetic radiation from electricity pylons.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on 29 November 1990 at columns *475-76*. A summary of the results of the National Radiological Protection Board's review of published data has been published in the Journal of Radiological Protection, Volume 11 No. 1, pp 3-62, a copy of which is available in the Library. The full reviews will be published shortly as NRPB reports. In addition, the NRPB has recently announced the establishment of an advisory group on non-ionising radiation which will review work on the biological effects of non-ionising radiation relevant to human health and advise NRPB on research priorities.

Dentists (Prescriptions)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of dentists charge for issuing a prescription to a patient as distinct from the patient charge per item.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not available in the form requested. Dentists have been able to claim a fee for the "issue of a prescription only" since 1 October 1990 and, like most dental fees, this is subject to a 75 per cent. patient charge for adult patients who are not exempt from charges. In the period up to 31 December 1990—the latest

for which figures are available—the Dental Practice Board scheduled only 16,533 claims for payment of this fee in England and Wales.

Breast Care Nurses

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the budget allocation for *(a)* the employment of breast care nurses in England and Wales and *(b)* the training of breast care nurses in England and Wales.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on health authorities' budget allocations for the employment of breast care nurses is not held centrally.

The Royal Marsden hospital has received funding from the NHS breast screening programme budget to run courses for breast care nurses since 1987-88:

	£
1987-88	17,000
1988-89	19,000
1989-90	20,000
1990-91	20,000

Arrangements in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of breast care nurses employed in each district health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether guidance has been issued from his Department to health authorities on the employment of breast care nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Department of Health guidance, DA(87)14, asked health authorities to establish a breast cancer screening programme on the model set out in the Forrest report on breast cancer screening; copies of both the letter and the report are available in the Library. The guidance stated that "assessment" teams should be supported by a nurse trained in the specialist skills required to care for women who may have cancer. It is for health authorities to decide what further arrangements they wish to make for the employment of breast care nurses.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there are one or more full-time breast care nurses employed in each breast cancer assessment centre.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to extend the reconstructive breast surgery services in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is a matter for individual health authorities to determine how the resources available should be used.

Lincolnshire Health Authorities

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were employed by the Sheffield regional health authority (1) to work in the area of the South Lincolnshire health authority in March 1979 and March 1991, respectively;

(2) to work in the area of the North Lincolnshire health authority in March 1979 and March 1991, respectively;

(3) how many consultants were employed by the Sheffield regional health authority to work in the area of the South Lincolnshire health authority in March 1979 and March 1991, respectively.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority, for details.

Immunisation

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children are immunised against diphtheria, whooping cough and measles in Eltham and Greenwich together with the corresponding figures for the south-east Thames region, England and the World Health Organisation's target percentage.

Mr. Dorrell: Provisional information for the financial year 1989-90 is shown in the table. This is the latest year for which figures are available.

Childhood Immunisation

	Diphtheria	*Whooping cough*	*Measles*[1]
England	89	78	84
South East Thames RHA	89	80	82
Greenwich DHA	78	68	69

[1] A combination vaccine against measles mumps and rubella (MMR) replaced measles—only vaccine from 1 October 1988.
The World Health Organisation's target for its European region was 90 per cent. coverage by 1990. More recent estimates by the COVER—Cover of Vaccination Evaluated Rapidly—programme managed by the communicable disease surveillance centre, show that by February 1991 the percentages for England had reached 90 for diphtheria, and tetanus and polio, 89 for MMR and 85 for whooping cough.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioners in Eltham and Greenwich have achieved their targets for child immunisation, pre-school boosters and cervical cytology in respect of their achievements on 1 October 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not available in the form requested. The percentages of GPs in the Greenwich and Bexley family health services authority area who received payments in respect of their achievements at 1 April 1990 are as follows:

Percentages of GPs receiving target payments

	Per cent.
Childhood immunisations	60
Pre-school booster	53
Cervical cytology	79

National Health Service Patients (Treatment)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have received treatment in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France and *(c)* elsewhere outside the United Kingdom at NHS expense in each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the European Community Social Security Regulations the United Kingdom is responsible for the health care costs of EC nationals resident here who travel elsewhere in the Community. Following are numbers of United Kingdom residents authorised to receive specific treatment in other EC countries:

Year	*Germany*	*France*	*Elsewhere*
1979	3	20	1
1980	6	16	4
1981	6	27	4
1982	8	14	9
1983	11	27	7
1984	15	20	13
1985	13	36	8
1986	17	28	13
1987	23	26	9
1988	17	40	23
1989	44	61	30
1990	69	118	72
[1]1991	18	42	23

[1] To date.

The EC regulations also cover immediately necessary treatment for conditions arising during a temporary visit. No precise data exists on numbers of United Kingdom residents given such treatment, nor on the number of NHS patients who have been treated in those non-EC countries with which the United Kingdom has bilateral reciprocal health agreements.

Abortion (RU486 Pill)

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take measures to ensure that the RU486 abortion pill is not marketed in the United Kingdom, in the light of recent additional evidence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Before the granting of a licence for a new drug in the United Kingdom the applicant must satisfy the licensing authority as to the safety, quality and efficacy of the drug as set out in the Medicines Act and in European directives.

All relevant information, whether or not it is favourable to the application, must be made available to the licensing authority by the applicant as soon as it becomes available.

It is for the manufacturer of any drug to decide whether or not, once a product licence has been granted under the Medicines Act, to market the drug in this country.

European Seminar (Glasgow)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department will be represented at the European seminar of the International Federation of Social Workers to be held in Glasgow from 2 to 6 September.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since this seminar is based in Scotland, the Scottish Office has had the lead in arrangements. My hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Scottish Office is hosting a reception for delegates during the seminar. Official notifications and invitations to other Departments have not yet been issued. The Department of Health will look with interest at attendance once such information is received.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We cannot apportion expenditure between the Department of Health and Social Security before 1985-86. The estimate expenditure for each succeeding financial year on fees and expenses for management consultants on health matters is as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1985-86	0·479
1986-87	2·103
1987-88	1·244
1988-89	1·584
1989-90	4·870
1990-91	2·870

The figures up to and including 1988-89 are approximate as expenditure was from a joint health and social security budget. In some cases expenditure has been apportioned where consultants have been engaged on both health and social security matters.

The budget for 1991-92 is £2·9 million.

In general, external management consultants are employed by the Department when expertise in a specialist technique is necessary; when investigations are required that extend beyond the Department's own boundary; or when the Department's own resources are too few, or too committed on other work, to tackle an urgent problem and help cannot be obtained from within the civil service.

Spectacles

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the annual *(a)* uptake of and *(b)* expenditure on financial assistance for spectacles since 1987 under the national health service voucher scheme.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Details of the number and cost of spectacle vouchers redeemed in England from 1987-88 are shown in the table.

Financial years	*Vouchers redeemed (millions)*	*Expenditure (£ millions)*
1987-88	2·524	46·316
1988-89	2·259	50·134
1989-90	2·270	51·056

Figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

Ophthalmic Opticians

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current fee paid to an ophthalmic optician for carrying out a national health service domiciliary visit.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The fee for domiciliary visits for ophthalmic opticians as from 1 April 1991 is £20 for the first and second patients seen at one address and £10 for subsequent patients.

Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he *(a)* will next meet and *(b)* last met the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians; and what subjects were and will be discussed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I met representatives of the federation at the general ophthalmic services publicity campaign launch on 19 February. No meeting is arranged with the federation in the immediate future.

NHS Trusts (Business Plans)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff and of what grade are in post at the Department of Health, and the national health service management executive, to monitor and manage the implementation of national health service trust business plans.

Mr. Dorrell: The preparation of NHS trust business plans is a matter for their own management boards. Certain financial parts of the business plan are monitored by the NHS trust finance branch of the NHS management executive.

The staff numbers and grades in post at present in this branch whose responsibilities are much wider than the monitoring of Trust business plans are:

	Number
Grade 5	0·75
PES	1·00
Grade 7	3·50
SEO	2·00
HEO(D)	1·00
HEO	3·00
EO	2·00
AO	1·00

There are occasions when input from other branches of the NHS management executive is required.

Pergolide

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the drug Pergolide is available to national health service patients.

Mrs. Bottomley: This product is not currently marketed in the United Kingdom.

British Fluoridation Society

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his answer of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *285*, what information he has on the organisation and structure of the British Fluoridation Society; whether it is a registered charity; and what involvement its members have in the fluoride chemicals industry.

Mr. Dorrell: The British Fluoridation Society—BFS—is a registered limited company. It has an elected council of approximately 25 members which meets three times a year and an executive of eight honorary officers of the society, which meets five times a year.

The BFS has a part-time administration officer based at its head office at 63 Wimpole street, London and a full-time information officer based at the school of dental surgery, university of Liverpool.

The BFS is not a registered charity. We are not aware of any involvement by its members in the fluoride chemicals industry.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his answer of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *285*, which regional health authorities are currently considering the implementation of water fluoridation in their areas; and if he will identify the extent of information, advice, materials and other assistance given to them in each of the last five years by the British Fluoridation Society.

Mr. Dorrell: New schemes or extensions to existing water fluoridation schemes are currently being considered in the North Western, West Midlands, Mersey, Northern, Yorkshire, Wessex and Oxford regions.

The Department does not keep information on the assistance given to regions by the British Fluoridation Society.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his answer of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *285*, what representations he has received from regional health authorities in the past five years requesting information, advice, materials and other assistance on the subject of implementing water fluoridation in their areas.

Mr. Dorrell: No record is maintained of all the occasions on which regional health authorities have approached the Department for such assistance over the past five years.

Sickle Cell Disease

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what will be the terms of reference for the proposed working party on sickle cell and thalassaemia;

(2) when the proposed working party on sickle cell and thalassaemia will report;

(3) what progress has been made in setting up a working party on sickle cell and thalassaemia;

(4) who will be the members of the proposed working party on sickle cell and thalassaemia;

(5) if he will make a statement on sickle cell and thalassaemia services.

Mr. Dorrell *[Holding answer 23 April 1991]:* At its meeting on 24 April, the standing medical advisory committee agreed to establish a working party on the clinical and service aspects of haemoglobinopathies. Membership and terms of reference of the working party have yet to be determined.

SCOTLAND

Pollution Research

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of Government research staff employed on work relating to pollution research in Scotland in each year since 1978.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The majority of Government-funded research staff working in the broad area of pollution research in Scotland are employees of research institutes and units which receive funding from United Kingdom departments and research councils.

Scottish Office commissions research projects in this area by contracting out to other bodies, mainly the Scottish universities and river authorities.

In terms of research staff directly employed by the Scottish Office to work on pollution research, almost all are located in the Agriculture and Fisheries Department's marine and freshwater laboratories. At these laboratories, approximately 65 research staff, at scientific officer and above are engaged in pollution research and this number has remained virtually constant since 1978.

Breast Care Nurses

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many breast care nurses appear on the national register of breast care nurses in Scotland;

(2) how many breast care nurses are employed in each health board in Scotland;

(3) what guidance has been issued from the Scottish Office to health boards on the employment of breast care nurses in Scotland;

(4) how many full-time breast care nurses are employed in each breast cancer assessment centre in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no such national register in Scotland and the term "breast care" nurse is not a recognised description. Each of the seven breast cancer assessment centres is funded to provide a nurse for counselling and other services to the patients. The nurse will also provide a link between the assessment centre and the surgical team in the hospital oncology department for those patients whose condition requires further investigation or treatment. No specific guidance has been given to health boards on employment of nurses in the screening units.

Outwith the national breast screening programme there are health visitors, midwives, district nurses and those nurses who provide care in oncology departments all of whom play a part in breat care, but information is not held centrally on the numbers involved.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the budget allocation for *(a)* the employment of breast care nurses in Scotland and *(b)* the training of breast care nurses in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally. Nurses are part of the team of staff and their costs are included in the allocations made to the health boards concerned. The total budget of the breast screening programme for 1991-92 is £3·346 million.

Glasgow Local Health Council

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names, addresses, qualifications and nominating bodies of all the members of the new Greater Glasgow health board local health council.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for Greater Glasgow health board and the hon. Gentleman may wish to approach the board.

Reconstructive Surgery

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to extend the reconstructive surgery services in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no plans to extend the reconstructive services beyond the existing centres.

Nursery Education

Mr. John Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of children aged three and four years were in receipt of nursery education in each *(a)* regional authority and *(b)* parliamentary constituency in Scotland in each of the years from 1978-79 to the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures for education authority nursery schools and departments at each September for which information is available are set out in the tables below. Information for 1985 and 1986 is not available.

Information by parliamentary constituency is not held centrally.

Three and four-year-olds in education authority nursery schools

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1987	1988	1989	1990[1]
Borders	299	313	301	363	387	394	359	390	438	447	470
Central	1,399	1,512	1,681	1,858	1,960	2,166	2,210	2,492	2,568	2,744	2,732
Dumfries and Galloway	253	257	266	247	271	287	316	428	550	625	630
Fife	3,192	3,235	3,280	3,142	3,439	3,805	3,993	4,193	4,402	4,329	4,388
Grampian	2,233	2,196	2,222	2,244	2,235	2,425	2,433	2,678	2,985	3,171	3,391
Highland	331	455	484	519	567	580	618	617	645	622	730
Lothian	6,718	6,529	6,795	6,799	7,045	7,477	7,966	7,965	8,064	7,969	8,457
Strathclyde	14,501	14,768	14,841	15,406	16,071	16,793	17,376	17,551	17,828	18,683	18,911
Tayside	1,841	1,933	2,007	2,014	2,097	2,112	2,136	2,344	2,516	2,975	3,326
Orkney	78	96	93	74	85	89	92	83	97	101	102
Shetland	32	86	99	91	85	82	102	110	111	119	137
Western Isles	160	151	162	156	169	146	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland total	31,037	31,531	32,231	32,913	34,411	36,356	37,601	38,851	40,204	41,785	43,274

[1] Provisional.

Percentage of three and four-year-old children in population

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1987	1988	1989	1990[1]
Borders	12·2	12·8	13·7	17·1	17·5	16·6	15·2	16·6	18·7	19·1	19·5
Central	19·3	21·4	25·2	28·8	29·3	31·2	31·2	37·8	39·2	41·9	41·4
Dumfries and Galloway	7·0	7·4	8·4	8·0	8·1	7·9	8·7	12·7	15·8	17·9	17·8
Fife	35·4	36·3	38·3	39·3	40·8	42·2	42·8	48·5	50·4	49·6	47·6

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1987	1988	1989	1990[1]
Grampian	18·2	18·0	18·7	19·4	18·3	18·6	18·6	21·2	24·0	25·5	26·1
Highland	6·3	8·5	9·1	10·2	10·7	10·3	10·5	11·6	12·3	11·9	13·6
Lothian	36·0	36·6	40·4	43·0	43·3	43·8	45·3	47·8	47·9	47·3	45·9
Strathclyde	22·2	23·2	24·7	27·7	27·8	27·7	27·6	29·6	30·1	31·6	30·9
Tayside	18·5	20·4	22·1	23·2	23·5	23·0	22·6	25·1	26·5	31·3	34·2
Orkney	16·8	19·4	19·3	14·9	16·5	17·9	18·3	18·3	20·7	21·5	20·4
Shetland	4·5	11·7	13·2	12·1	12·1	11·1	13·6	17·7	18·1	19·4	20·5
Western Isles	19·2	16·8	18·4	19·3	19·7	16·2	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Scotland total	22·9	23·8	25·6	27·8	27·9	28·0	28·2	30·8	31·9	33·1	33·0

[1] Provisional.

Local Tax Liability

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, under his new local tax proposals, improvements to a house result in its value rising and crossing the threshold into a higher band, he envisages that this change in the property's valuation will be reflected at any time in the local tax liability.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The treatment of houses which are the subject of such alterations is a matter for consultation.

Road Improvements

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will express the amount of money available to Highland regional council for spending on road improvements per mile of road; if he will further express the sum relevant to the equivalent total for the other Scottish regional councils; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Capital allocations to Scottish regional councils for roads and transport are not project-specific and take into account expenditure proposed both on new roads and on improving existing roads; and the allocation issued to Strathclyde region additionally takes into account capital expenditure proposed on rail projects by the Strathclyde passenger transport executive.

Final capital allocations for roads and transport to regional councils for 1991-92 are as follows:

Council	Total allocation (£ million)	Allocation £ per mile of road[1]
Highland	12·5	3,014
Borders	4·2	2,364
Central	4·4	3,734
Dumfries and Galloway	6·3	2,535
Fife	8·3	6,335
Grampian	12·0	2,621
Lothian	14·4	6,681
Strathclyde	75·6	9,818
Tayside	9·5	3,347

[1] Road lengths at 1 April 1989. Direct comparisons of allocations per road length can be misleading as road widths and levels of use vary considerably.

Out-migration

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the net out-migration from Scotland in each year since 1970 to the most recent available figure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is given in the following table:

Estimated net civilian out-migration
12 months ending June of year shown

Year	000s
1971	[1]21·7
1972	28·6
1973	11·7
1974	3·0
1975	20·0
1976	5·8
1977	10·8
1978	17·3
1979	14·6
1980	16·3
1981	23·1
1982	14·9
1983	17·8
1984	9·1
1985	12·6
1986	16·1
1987	15·0
1988	24·7
1989	6·2
1990	[2] – 13·5

[1] The estimate for 1970-71 was compiled on a slightly different basis to those for later years.
[2] There was net in-migration in the 12 months to June 1990.

Local Tax

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he envisages that his planned local tax will require a transfer of staff from local authority assessors departments to the district valuer's office.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Consultations are continuing on the arrangements for valuing properties for the council tax and a final decision has still to be taken.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he envisages that the new local tax will necessitate a new valuation roll, itemising each property as the charging basis.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There will be a need for some form of record. The nature of this will be a matter for consultation.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of (i) producing and (ii) distributing the Scottish Office booklet "You and the Community Charge—A Step by Step Guide".

Mr. Allan Stewart: The cost of preparing, printing and distributing this booklet was £246,367, comprising production costs of £159,800, distribution costs of £70,567 and the agent's management fee of £16,000.

Pupil Testing

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the proportion of parents who have withdrawn their children from sitting the primary 4 and primary 7 tests in each education authority area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Forestry Commission; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission has two statistical branches in its research division which employs scientists and supporting staff. The scientists are employed on computer programming and systems analysis as well as statistical work, and it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the time they spent solely on statistical duties. In addition, a statistician is employed in the Forestry Commission's headquarters office.

Staff in post (SIP) and complement (C) on 1 April

	Research division										HQ	
	Scientists		EOs		AAs[1]		Typists		Foresters		SSOs	
	SIP	C	SIP	C	SIP	C	SIP	C	SIP	C	SIP	C
1979	11	12	1	1	7	7	1	1	1	1	0	0
1980	9	12	1	1	6	6	1	1	1	1	[2]1	1
1981	13	13	1	1	6	6	1	1	2	2	1	1
1982	13	13	1	1	6	6	1	1			1	1
1983	13	13			6	6	1	1			1	1
1984	13	13			6	6	1	1			1	1
1985	13	14			5	5	1	1			1	1
1986	12	14			5	5	1	1			1	1
1987	16	16			5	5					1	1
1988	16	16			5	5					1	1
1989	17	17			4	4					1	1
1990	17	17			4	4					1	1
1991	17	17			4	4					[3]0·5	0·5

EO = Executive Officer.
AA = Administrative Assistant.
SSO = Senior Scientific Officer.
[1] Includes the former grades of clerical assistant and data processor.
[2] The grade of the HQ statistician in 1980 was senior statistician.
[3] Part-time.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Scottish Development Agency; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise, and I have asked the Chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for East Lothian on 24 April, *Official Report*, column *458*, if he will make it his policy to order a public inquiry into any proposal to establish a dry store for waste nuclear fuel at any site in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Nuclear's consideration of the dry storage of spent AGR fuel in preference to its immediate reprocessing remains at a relatively early stage. Any application to build such a dry store would be made in the first instance to the planning authority; it would be premature at this juncture to anticipate how it might be handled.

Foxes

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what is the cost to the Forestry Commission of killing foxes in Scotland, England and Wales for each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 1 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *723*.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the cost of implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 15 April 1991]:* It is estimated that the cost of implementation would be about £3 million. As in the rest of the United Kingdom, it has been decided not to implement these sections at present; but the position will be reviewed carefully when the impact of the wider community care reforms set out in the White Paper "Caring for People" can be assessed.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision exists for the profoundly mentally handicapped aged 16 years and over in *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* in specialist residential facilities within the community.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 April 1991]:* Information on the detailed provision made for particular categories of mentally handicapped persons is not centrally available.

Nursery Education

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the revenue costs of making the provision of nursery education a statutory responsibility of local authorities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 April 1991]:* On the assumption that the present proportion of part and full time nursery school places is maintained, and using current unit costs, it is estimated that the total annual revenue cost of providing nursery education for all three and four-year-olds would be around £124 million.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list (1) the number of people on the waiting list for operations or procedures in the Lothian health board area in *(a)* acute specialties, *(b)* general surgery and *(c)* orthopaedic surgery in each month from October 1990 to March 1991;

(2) the number of people on the waiting list for operations or procedures in the Lothian health board area for *(a)* ear, nose and throat surgery, *(b)* ophthalmology, *(c)* urology, *8d)* dentistry, *(e)* general medicine, *(f)* dermatology, *(g)* respiratory medicine, *(h)* paediatric surgery, *(i)* gynaecology, *(j)* neurosurgery, *(k)* cardiothoracic surgery and *(l)* neurology in each month between October 1990 and March 1991;

(3) how many people were on the waiting list for operations in all specialties in the Lothian health board area in each month from October 1990 to March 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The latest available information is set out in the table below:

Waiting lists[1] December 1990

	Total number
Acute specialties	11,065
General surgery	2,715
Orthopaedic	1,285
Ear, nose and throat	2,473
Ophthalmology	1,321
Urology	1,202
Dentistry[2]	309
General medicine	326
Respiratory medicine	—
Dermatology	20
Surgical paediatrics	392
Gynaecology	1,004
Neurosurgery	231
Cardiothoracic surgery	281
Neurology	74
All specialties	13,589

[1] Total in-patient and day case.
[2] Includes orthodontics and paediatric medicine and oral surgery and oral medicine.

Elective Coronary Surgery

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Midlothian, of 17 April, *Official Report*, column *193*, if he is yet in a position to announce his decision on whether to allocate more funds for elective coronary surgery in the Lothian health board area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* Negotiations are currently taking place with the health boards concerned about the activity level and funding requirements for major cardiac surgery in 1991-92.

Council Tax

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in relation to his statement made on 23 April 1991 on the proposals for a council tax, how many domestic properties in *(a)* the city of Aberdeen district and *(b)* Aberdeen constituency fall into each band in his banding system; on what date the valuations were made; and by whom.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* For the purposes of the illustrative council tax calculations it was estimated that the numbers of properties in the city of Aberdeen district falling into bands A to G were as follows:

Band	*Number of properties*
A	20,071
B	13,685
C	13,685
D	12,773
E	11,860
F	9,123
G	10,036

The estimate of the distribution of the properties by capital values was based on information provided by the Inland Revenue valuation office as part of an exercise which began in early March. No estimates are available on a constituency basis.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much it would cost in total for a full year to restore child benefit for *(a)* the first child, *(b)* the second child and *(c)* all children to its value (i) in 1979 and (ii) in 1987.

Mr. Jack: On the basis of the latest estimates, the gross additional costs in 1991-92 of paying child benefit at its April 1979 value in real terms—£9·90 a week—would be *(a)* £585 million, *(b)* £540 million and *(c)* £1,345 million. The corresponding net costs after adjustments to national insurance and income-related benefits are *(a)* £415 million, *(b)* £395 million and *(c)* £950 million.

The gross additional costs of making payment at the April 1987 real-terms value (£9·55) would be *(a)* £460 million, *(b)* £470 million and *(c)* £1,120 million. The corresponding net costs are *(a)* £325 million, *(b)* £345 million and *(c)* £790 million.

These costs do not take account of the increases in child benefit from next October, at a cost of around £210 million in 1991-92, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget statement.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the full-year cost of raising child benefit in October to £9·55 a week for all children, assuming a corresponding increase in income-related benefit allowances for children.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 30 April 1991.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total cost of child benefit in each year since 1979 in cash and real terms; and what that figure would be if it had been uprated in line with inflation.

Mr. Jack: The costs are contained in the table:

Year	*Cash value* (£ million)	*Equivalent value at 1990-91 prices* (£ million)	*Notional Expenditure*[1] (£ million)
1979-80	2,787	6,026	
1980-81	2,944	5,379	3,000
1981-82	3,372	5,619	3,700
1982-83	3,660	5,694	3,900
1983-84	3,988	5,930	4,100
1984-85	4,276	6,051	4,200
1985-86	4,468	5,997	4,400
1986-87	4,513	5,854	4,600
1987-88	4,598	5,663	4,800
1988-89	4,515	5,175	4,900
1989-90	4,537	4,889	5,300
1990-91	4,636	4,636	5,900
1991-92	[2]5,286	4,940	[3]—

[1] Notional expenditure represents estimated expenditure in the financial year, had benefit levels at the appropriate uprating dates reflected the movement in the RPI from April 1979 up to those dates.
[2] Estimated costs including October 1991 increases.
[3] Relevant RPI figure not yet available.

Income Support

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in receipt of state pension who previously received income support are now ineligible for income support as from 6 April for *(a)* Bristol, South, *(b)* Bristol, East, *(c)* Bristol, *(d)* South West region and *(e)* nationally.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support rates increased from 8 April 1991. The estimated number of income support claimants receiving state pensions who, following the uprating, are no longer eligible for income support is 45,000. However, the extra £80 million directed to younger pensioners at the recent uprating helped another 105,000 to retain their entitlement.

Estimates are not available for the Bristol area or the South-West region.

Pensioners whose incomes are above the level of income support can, of course, claim other benefits such as housing benefit or community charge benefit. They can also apply for help with optical, dental and other charges under the NHS low income scheme.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1989 annual statistical inquiry, uprated to 1990-91 prices and benefit levels.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners have been taken out of income support arising from the April 1991 pension increase.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 18 April 1991]:* The number of claimants who no longer qualify for income support as a direct result of the recent increase in retirement pension is 40,000. If income support for couples receiving the ordinary pensioner premium had continued to exceed full basic retirement pension levels this number would be reduced only by about 1,000. The extra £80 million directed to younger pensioners at the recent uprating helped another 105,000 to retain their entitlement.

Pensioners whose incomes are above the level of income support can, of course, claim other benefits such as housing benefit or community charge benefit. They can also apply for help with optical, dental and other charges under the NHS low income scheme.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1989 annual statistical inquiry, uprated to 1990-91 prices and benefit levels.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people on income support broken down into *(a)* lone parents and *(b)* others, are working between 16 and 24 hours a week.

Miss Widdecombe: We estimate that approximately 60,000 people are receiving income support and working between 16 and 24 hours a week. Of these, about 30,000 are lone parents.

Source: Modelled on data drawn from the 1985-86-87 family expenditure surveys.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *281*, when he expects to be in a position to place in the Library the figures for claims and payments for cold weather payments in respect of the February cold snap; and if those figures will be broken down by region and constituency and by category of claimant eligibility.

Mr. Scott: Information relating to the 1990-91 period is still incomplete as claims are allowed up to three months after the cold weather period. Statistical information for the whole winter period will be placed in the Library as soon as it becomes available.

This information has been collated by region up to and including March 1991 and by district office from April 1991 onwards. It cannot be broken down by constituency or category of claimant eligibility.

National Insurance

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional yield in a full year from abolishing the upper earnings limit for employees' class 1 national insurance contributions.

Mr. Jack: If the upper earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions were abolished, it is estimated that contribution yield would increase by some £2·5 billion a year.

Carers' Allowance

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to make the carers' allowance available to people over the age of 59 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Invalid care allowance is the main social security benefit for carers. It is intended to help to

maintain the income of someone who gives up the opportunity of full-time work to provide substantial and regular care to a severely disabled person. It is not normally available to people after they reach pension age but, subject to the overlapping benefit rules, it continues to be payable beyond pension age to people entitled beforehand. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: The estimated expenditure from 1984-85 onwards on fees and expenses for management consultants on social security matters is in the table.

The figures are approximate since expenditure up to and including the 1988-89 financial year is from a joint health and social security budget. In some cases, expenditure has been apportioned where consultants have been engaged on both health and social security matters. The figures include some computer consultancy where this cannot be separately identified.

The information for years prior to 1984-85 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*£ million*
1984-85	0·959
1985-86	1·722
1986-87	0·976
1987-88	1·082
1988-89	1·203
1989-90	2·942
1990-91	5·158
1991-92	2·454

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have been disqualified from unemployment benefit for voluntary unemployment, broken down into categories of disqualification, in each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is in table 1.1 of "Unemployment Benefit Statistics—Quarterly Analysis of Decisions of Adjudication Officers", copies of which are in the Library.

Community Charge Benefit

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the net income at which community charge benefit runs out for the average community charge in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* inner London in 1991-92 for the family types (i) a single person aged under 25 years, (ii) a single person aged over 25 years, (iii) a pensioner couple, (iv) a single parent family with a child aged eight and (v) a married couple with two children aged four and six years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the following table:

Net Income at which entitlement to Community Charge Benefit ceases

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Inner London*
	£	*£*	*£*	*£*
Average community charge	252·00	253·00	121·00	219·00
Average weekly charge	4·82	4·84	2·31	4·19
Maximum 80 per cent. benefit	3·86	3·87	1·85	3·35
Single under 25	61·85	61·96	48·49	58·49
Single over 25	70·35	70·46	56·99	66·99
Pensioner couple 60 to 74	134·56	134·76	107·83	127·83
Pensioner couple 75 to 79	137·01	137·21	110·28	130·28
Pensioner couple 80	139·86	140·06	113·13	133·13
Single parent child under 11	121·70	121·81	108·34	118·34
Couple, two children under 11	158·31	158·51	131·58	151·58

Notes:

1. The average community charge figures take account of the £140 reduction in charge levels, they do not however take account of the community charge reduction scheme. The net income figures given in the table will be lower if the average charges are adjusted to take account of the average reduction under the community charge reduction scheme.
2. People below pension age are assumed to be in employment and subject to relevant earnings disregards.
3. Average weekly charge and maximum 80 per cent. benefit relate to a single person, or each member of a couple.

Disablement Benefits

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving severe disablement allowance at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: The information as at 31 March 1990, the latest date for which information is available, is set out in the table:

	Male	*Female*
age under 20	12,800	9,300
20 to 24	15,100	11,500
25 to 29	17,000	10,600
30 to 34	10,700	12,500
35 to 39	10,500	13,200
40 to 44	9,100	18,400
45 to 49	8,700	16,600
50 to 54	6,100	22,100
55 to 59	6,700	27,500
60 to 64	8,300	19,000
65 and Over	7,400	11,500
all ages	112,400	172,200

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving income support with a disability premium at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is in tables 4.1 to 4.1C and 5.2 of the income support annual statistical inquiry for 1989, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving housing benefit with a disability premium at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Miss Widdecombe: At August 1990, the rent rebate and rent allowance case load of those aged less than 60 who

were not getting income support, but who were allowed a disability, or severe disability premium was 155,000. The latest comparable figure, for May 1989, for those also in receipt of income support is 140,000. Above the age of 60 the higher pensioner premium is awarded in place of a disability premium. The figures cannot be cross-classified by sex or age.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving community charge benefit with a disability premium at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving war disablement benefit at each rate at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: The number of war disablement pensions in payment at 31 March 1991, was as follows:

Percentage rate	*Number of pensions*
20	76,611
30	42,635
40	23,860
50	12,867
60	9,132
70	6,711
80	6,200
90	2,310
100	11,714
Total	192,040

Information is not available on the breakdown of these figures by sex and standard age cohorts; the number of war disablement pensioners by age is, however, as follows:

Age	*Number of pensioners*
Under 20	61
20-29	1,381
30-39	4,000
40-49	9,543
50-59	21,662
60-64	14,967
65-69	38,154
70-79	85,042
80-89	15,068
90 and over	2,162
Total	192,040

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving mobility allowance at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: The latest information at 18 April 1991 is in the table:

Age	*Male*	*Female*
Up to 9	5,450	4,180
10 to 14	4,880	4,030
15 to 19	5,590	4,840
20 to 24	7,840	6,740
25 to 29	8,990	8,300
30 to 34	9,200	9,360
35 to 39	10,610	11,830
40 to 44	15,840	18,070
45 to 49	19,970	22,230
50 to 54	29,050	30,950
55 to 59	44,650	43,910
60 to 64	67,600	59,790
65 to 69	69,190	56,990
70 to 74	22,420	21,150
75 and over	1,610	1,890
	322,890	304,260

Benefits Agency

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total estimated cost of supplying Benefits Agency staff with uniforms; and whether the cost of uniforms is being deducted from the benefit budgets of each local office.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of supplying uniforms for Benefits Agency staff is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the agency.

He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total estimated cost of supplying Benefits Agency staff in Bradford with new uniforms.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of supplying uniforms for Benefits Agency staff is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency.

He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to ensure that all garments supplied to Benefits Agency staff will be made from cloth originating in the United Kingdom and made up by suppliers based in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Information concerning the supplies of garments to the Benefits Agency is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency.

He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving attendance allowance at each rate at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table:

Attendance allowances recipients at 31 March 1990
Figures are rounded (thousands)[1]

Age	Higher rate		Lower rate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2-4	4	3	6	4
5-9	7	5	11	8
10-15	6	4	10	7
16-19	3	2	5	4
20-29	7	6	13	12
30-39	5	6	10	10
40-49	6	8	10	11
50-59	9	13	14	16
60-64	9	10	13	13
65-69	11	14	16	19
70-74	12	17	17	24
75-79	15	28	22	40
80+	24	105	40	139
TOTAL	119	223	187	307

[1] Estimated from a 100 per cent. count of statistical records adjusted to reflect estimates of the extent to which they overstate the number of live cases. Estimates for the older age groups are particularly prone to error.

Invalidity Benefits

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving invalid care allowance at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table:

Invalid care allowance recipients at 2 January 1991
All figures rounded

Age	Male	Female
Under 20	140	430
20 to 24	430	2,600
25 to 29	790	8,380
30 to 34	1,200	14,280
35 to 39	1,800	15,440
40 to 44	2,630	17,140
45 to 49	3,020	14,970
50 to 54	3,670	15,050
55 to 59	4,930	15,570
60 to 64	5,010	6,230
65 and over	250	—
Total		133,910

Note: Any discrepancies due to rounding.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving invalidity benefit at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott: The total number of people receiving invalidity benefit at 31 March 1990, the latest date for which information is available, was 1,208,900. The table shows a breakdown by sex and standard age bands.

Thousands

Age	Men	Women
All ages	916·8	292·1
Under 20	0·1	0·2
20 to 24	5·1	8·2
25 to 29	16·8	20·1
30 to 34	24·3	21·3
35 to 39	30·9	26·1
40 to 44	53·5	29·6
45 to 49	63·8	36·6
50 to 54	108·2	53·6
55 to 59	171·3	67·3
60 to 64	266·2	29·1
65 and over	176·6	—

Home Visits

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions he has issued to local offices about discontinuing home visits on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Instructions issued to local offices concerning home visits are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

National Insurance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 of extending *(a)* employers' and *(b)* employee national insurance contributions to all taxable benefits in kind, assuming (i) the current structure of national insurance contributions and (ii) no ceiling on employee national insurance contributions.

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue estimates that the value of benefits in kind reported in the 1991-92 tax year in respect of directors and employees earning over £8,500 a year will be approximately £7·1 billion.

If employers' national insurance contributions were levied on this amount, the contribution yield would be around £750 million. Employees' contributions would amount to some £250 million if the upper earnings limit were maintained; or £650 million if the ceiling were removed. All these figures assume payment by employer and employees at the highest "not contracted out" rate of national insurance contributions—10·4 per cent. for employers and 9 per cent. for employees.

However, tax-paying employers would be able to claim corporation tax or income tax relief which would reduce income to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of abolishing the ceiling on *(a)* employees' national insurance contributions and *(b)* national insurance contributions for the self-employed.

Mr. Jack: If the ceiling for employees and self-employed national insurance contributions were abolished, it is estimated that contribution yield would increase in 1991-92 by some £2·2 billion and £0·2 billion respectively. In a full year the increase would be £2·5 billion and £0·5 billion respectively.

Overpayments Recovery Guide

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to whom his Department's manual, overpayments recovery guide, is circulated; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Jack: The administration of overpayments recovery is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief

executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies of the reply will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Income Support

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the numbers of people at each of his Department's offices who are now having deductions made from their income support to cover the poll tax.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how many people claim each benefit payable *(a)* at each of the Nottingham social security offices and *(b)* in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply on 27 March at column 449]:* I regret that the figure quoted for severe disability allowance (SDA) in Great Britain as 382,600 was incorrect and should have been shown as 256,600.

Pensioner Couples

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of new basic pensioner couples who are no longer entitled to income support because of the recent rise in basic pension; and what is the average amount that their income is above the required level.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 22 April 1991]:* The estimated number of pensioner couples who are no longer entitled to income support following the recent uprating is 10,000 of which 5,000 were in receipt of the income support ordinary pensioner premium. However, had income support levels for pensioner couples of all ages continued to exceed full basic retirement pension levels, only around 1,000 of these would have retained their entitlement. The average amount by which weekly income exceeds current benefit levels for pensioner couples who are no longer entitled to income support is estimated to be 69p.

Pensioners whose incomes are above the level of income support can, of course, claim other benefits such as housing benefit or community charge benefit. They can also apply for help with optical, dental and other charges under the NHS low income scheme.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1989 annual statistical inquiry, uprated to 1990-91 prices and benefit levels.

DEFENCE

Aldermaston

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the release of tritium at AWE Aldermaston in February; whether there was any danger to the population living around the establishment; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of the present effectiveness of the monitoring equipment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A small quantity of tritium—some 27 terabecquerels—was accidentally released on 19 February 1991. The highest dose which could have been received by any member of the public was much less than 1 microSievert, several thousand times smaller than the average annual dose to the United Kingdom public from all background sources. There was therefore no danger to the local population or effect on the environment. The effectiveness of monitoring equipment at AWE was well demonstrated by the fact that it picked up these extremely low levels.

Defence Workers (Radiation)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *411*, if he will now provide a breakdown for (i) Rosyth dockyard, (ii) Devonport dockyard, (iii) Aldermaston atomic weapons establishment, (iv) Coulport RNAD and (v) the Faslane submarine base, of individual radiation dose exposures for workers in the bands *(a)* 0 to 10, *(b)* 10 to 15, *(c)* 15 to 20, *(d)* 20 to 30, *(e)* 30 to 40 and *(f)* greater than 40 mSv for the year 1990;

(2) if he will give a breakdown for *(a)* HMS Neptune and *(b)* HMS Defiance of individual radiation dose exposures for individuals in the bands (i) 0 to 10, (ii) 10 to 15, (iii) 15 to 20, (iv) 20 to 30, (v) 30 to 40 and (vi) greater than 40 mSv for the year 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Wind Power

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress achieved to date in his Department's wind power research programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the DRA, Mr. Nigel Hughes, to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Fees paid to management consultants engaged centrally by the Ministry of Defence for the years 1984-85 to 1990-91 are as follows:

FY	*£ million*
1984-85	0·604
1985-86	1·787
1986-87	6·203
1987-88	5·140
1988-89	3·109
1989-90	5·292
1990-91	3·935
1991-92	[1]3·912

[1] Budget provision.

Figures for earlier years cannot be produced without disproportionate effort.

Defence Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries who are attending the defence component and equipment exhibition at the national exhibition centre, from 14 to 16 May.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 13 March at column *575*.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the officials of his Department who will be attending the defence component and equipment exhibition at the national exhibition centre, Birmingham, from 14 to 16 May.

Mr. Alan Clark: Various officials will attend as part of their normal duties.

The Gulf

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the water allowance received by troops during the recent conflict in the Gulf has now been withdrawn from troops serving in that area; why certain categories of accommodation have also been withdrawn; whether other facilities provided during the conflict are under consideration for withdrawal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is normal practice for the provision of accommodation, allowances and facilities for service personnel to be subject to modification in the light of changed circumstances. The water allowance in the Gulf has not been withdrawn.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why reservists called up during the Gulf war received a smaller number of days leave than regular soldiers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Regular soldiers returning from the Gulf were granted 28 days' leave against their normal annual leave entitlement.

No reservist served for more than four months in the Army, and 21 days' leave was considered very fair.

Bloodhound Missile

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to start the development of a replacement for the Bloodhound missile.

Mr Alan Clark: It is currently intended to invite international industry to tender against a cardinal points specification for a future medium surface-to-air missile system.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place with NATO authorities regarding a possible replacement for the Bloodhound missile.

Mr. Alan Clark: We have consulted NATO authorities and our NATO allies on a number of occasions.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff have been involved in the study of a possible replacement for the Bloodhound missile.

Mr. Alan Clark: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what feasibility studies into a replacement for the Bloodhound missile have taken place.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom has undertaken its own national medium surface-to-air missile system feasibility study and has also participated in an Independent European Programme Group study.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure has been incurred to date on the study of a possible replacement for the Bloodhound missile.

Mr. Alan Clark: The MOD incurred commitments of £1·5 million on extramural support for the national and international MSAM studies. Details of intramural expenditure could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications have taken place with industry regarding a possible replacement for the Bloodhound missile.

Mr. Alan Clark: Industry was involved in the national and international MSAM system studies. It has also been consulted about our plans to issue an invitation to tender. In December 1990 an announcement was made in the MOD's contracts bulletin to coincide with the distribution to industry of a draft of the cardinal points specification for comment.

Defence Research Agency

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what estimates have been made of the possible reductions in employment at the Defence Research Agency resulting from the "Options for Change" study;

(2) what arrangements have been made for the Defence Research Agency to carry out non-military work.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the DRA, Mr. Nigel Hughes, to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Service Personnel (Housing)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his anwswer of 24 April, which local authorities he has consulted in the course of his examination of the housing needs of service personnel.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Until decisions on the future size and shape of the armed forces have been taken, it would be premature to discuss housing requirements with individual local authorities.

United Kingdom-Soviet Military Meetings

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, if he will list the bilateral and multilateral fora at which United Kingdom and Soviet service personnel meet.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The multilateral fora in which United Kingdom and Soviet service personnel meet

include: meetings under CSCE auspices; the CFE negotiations in Vienna; the conference on disarmament; and visits to NATO at Evere. Occasions for bilateral meetings include: visits and exchanges; annual discussions on the prevention of incidents at sea agreement; contacts between United Kingdom attachés in Moscow and the Soviet Ministry of Defence and between Soviet attachés in London and my Department; and contacts in third countries between United Kingdom service attachés and their Soviet counterparts.

Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions have taken place with local authorities regarding the possible sale of land or property at the royal aircraft establishment at Farnborough;

(2) what plans exist to dispose of land or property at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We announced in September 1990 our preliminary view that research and experimental flying, currently undertaken at Bedford, Boscombe Down and Farnborough, should be collocated at Boscombe Down. Since then, we have been in close consultation with a range of interested parties, including the local authorities. We are currently considering the results of these consultations and hope to make an announcement shortly. We have also announced recently a number of separate studies into a range of sites—including Farnborough—which go to make up the newly formed Defence Research Agency. These studies are at an early stage and decisions on them will not be taken for some time. A substantial presence will be retained on the Farnborough site.

Operation Haven

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what RAF resources are currently being used in Operation Haven.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are three Hercules C-130 transport aircraft and 12 Chinook helicopters from the Royal Air Force based in Turkey undertaking relief operations.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of current RAF flights from the United Kingdom to Turkey is being used for the support of military operations; and what proportion is being used for the transport of civilian relief supplies.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Initially, there were six flights carrying relief supplies to Turkey by RAF aircraft prior to the Overseas Development Administration chartering its own aircraft. Currently, all RAF flights between the United Kingdom and Turkey are in support of the deployment of 3 Commando Brigade and other units undertaking duties on Operation Haven. Civilian relief supplies from the United Kingdom to Turkey are currently packed at RAF Lyneham and are being delivered from Heathrow by a Boeing 707 chartered by the ODA.

Defence Technology Enterprises Ltd.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current staffing establishment of Defence Technology Enterprises Ltd.; and what it has been in each year since the establishment of the company.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The staffing of Defence Technology Enterprises Ltd. is a matter for the company.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to changing the role or size of Defence Technology Enterprises Ltd.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The size and commercial strategy of DTE Ltd. are matters for the company. The MOD continues to have a formal relationship with DTE which is being reassessed to reflect the creation of the Defence Research Agency.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many licences or signed options to use Ministry of Defence technology have been arranged by Defence Technology Enterprises Ltd. in each year since its establishment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number of licences and signed options granted by DTE Ltd. is primarily a matter for the company. Cumulative totals were, however, quoted in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1987 to 1989 inclusive.

RAF Reserve

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what encouragement is given to pilots who leave the RAF to participate in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Volunteer Reserve.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All officers who leave the RAF are provided with resettlement literature which includes full details on both the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Volunteer Reserve; those who show an interest are encouraged to contact their nearest Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadron or RAF Volunteer Reserve flight.

Germany (Environmental Improvements)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, what commitments have been entered into with the German authorities relating to environmental improvements.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We have a general commitment to respect host nation legislation in accordance with the NATO status of forces agreement. The supplementary agreement to the SOFA also provides for such matters as the avoidance of unnecessary exercise damage, the application of German regulations for construction, use of installations for defence purposes and public safety. We are constantly aware of the German authorities' concerns and have issued an environmental protection directive and taken other measures to prevent or minimise environmental damages.

NATO Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place with his NATO counterparts regarding possible command arrangements for a NATO rapid reaction force.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Proposals for changes in alliance forces, including the creation of a rapid reaction corps, are under discussion in NATO. No decisions have yet been taken.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any new safety features on British nuclear weapons have been introduced in the last 30 years;

(2) whether any changes have taken place to procedures for the handling of nuclear weapons that have enhanced safety in the last 30 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on 25 March, *Official Report*, column *302*. Nuclear weapon safety is under continuous review, but the hon. Member will appreciate why I cannot reveal details of changes in design or procedures that may have arisen through this process.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain a copy of the report of the panel on nuclear weapons safety commissioned by the United States Energy Secretary for the Ministry of Defence library.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications have taken place with the United States Government regarding nuclear weapons safety.

Mr. Alan Clark: We have regular and frequent communications with the United States Government in this area.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 2 May 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Association of Probation Officers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met representatives of the National Association of Probation Officers to discuss the new framework for the probation service.

Mr. John Patten: The then Home Secretary met the National Association of Probation Officers on 3 August 1987 to discuss "Probation—The Next Five Years", a statement produced jointly by the Central Council of Probation Committees, the Association of Chief Probation Officers and NAPO.

Cars (Anti-Theft Measures)

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now discuss with representatives of the motoring organisations, consumer associations and motor manufacturers the desirability of fitting laminated glass in cars to enhance their anti-theft properties.

Mr. John Patten: We are considering this matter, in consultation with others. In doing so, we must take account of both the security and safety implications of fitting laminated glass.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet representatives of the motor manufacturers to discuss increasing anti-theft standards in automobiles.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend met the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders on 24 April and he and I met representatives from 11 motor manufacturing companies on 29 April to discuss car security. At these meetings we discussed measures that could be taken by the manufacturers further to improve car security and the individual manufacturers and SMMT will provide an update on how progress can be made in about three months' time.

Prisoners (Visits)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that prisoners are imprisoned at a convenient distance for regular visits from their families.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Nearness to the prisoner's home or that of his or her likely visitors is a factor taken into account when sentenced prisoners are allocated to training establishments in England and Wales. But prison staff also take into account other factors, including the availability of places and security and control considerations, as well as any other needs the prisoner may have.

Civil Defence

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has made any decision on the reviews of civil defence and civil emergency planning undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Magistrates Courts, Devon

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will announce his decision on changes in the magistrates courts in Devon;

(2) when he expects to announce that a decision has been made on the future of the magistrates court in South Molton.

Mr. John Patten: We hope to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Police Officers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female police officers there were in England and Wales on 1 January 1990; what percentage of them were promoted during 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 1 January 1990, there were 13,829 women police officers in England and Wales. Information on the total numbers of officers promoted is not centrally held.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male police officers there were in England and Wales on 1 January 1990; and what percentage of them were promoted during 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 1 January 1990, there were 112,281 male police officers in England and Wales. Information on the total numbers of officers promoted is not centrally held.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prison suicides in each of the years 1987 to date in which the coroner identified lack of medical care as a material factor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: There have been five cases of self-inflicted death in prison service establishments since 1987 in which the inquest verdict on the cause of death made reference to a lack of care. Of these, one death was in 1987, three were in 1990 and one in 1991.

The verdicts concerned did not distinguish between medical care and other means of providing care for prisoners. The duty of care is shared by all prison staff, not only medical or nursing staff. The Government are concerned to ensure that proper standards of care are achieved in prisons. We are giving very serious consideration to the recommendations made about this in the report on suicide and self-injury by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons.

Data Protection Register

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total sum paid out in fees by the office of the Data Protection Registrar to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I set out below the registrar's expenditure on specialist advice, other than public relations, in the years since his office was established in 1984:

	£
1984-85	15,302
1985-86	37,383
1986-87	6,558
1987-88	9,764
1988-89	36,788
1989-90	17,416
1990-91	31,229

The budget for 1991-92 is £30,000.

I understand separate figures for management consultancies could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Property, London

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much land his Department owns in London; and how much of that land is unused.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The most recent available information is that the Home Office owns about 230 acres of land in the Greater London area. The departmental register of unused and underused land, which is available for inspection by any member of the public, shows that the only unused portion of that land is an area of approximately 10 acres at Feltham, in the London borough of Hounslow.

National Sporting Events

Sir Alan Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from members of the public seeking an assurance that national sporting events will continue to be available on the main television channels as well as on cable and satellite.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Since the revised list of events drawn up under section 182 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 was published on 17 April, the Home Office has received 42 letters from members of the public about it. Events on the list may not be shown on pay-per-view terms; but there has never been any guarantee that particular sporting events, whether or not included on the list, will be shown on terrestrial television services.

Police Force Numbers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each police authority in Wales, for each of the past five years, 1991 and 1992, the recommendation made by the chief constable as to the number of police officers needed by that force to maintain an adequate level of cover.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 1986 the four Welsh police authorities have made applications to the Secretary of State for increases in establishment as shown in the table:

	Dyfed-Powys	*Gwent*	*North Wales*	*South Wales*
1986-87	1	nil	niil	nil
1987-88	nil	17	nil	nil
1988-89	nil	42	41	66
1989-90	nil	33	31	77
1990-91	8	11	21	67
1991-92	nil	9	nil	nil
1992-93	50	10	30	44

Wolds Remand Prison

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the standard of service which will be expected of a private sector company contracted to run Wolds remand prison.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Work has now been completed on the specification for the operation of Wolds remand prison under private sector management and the selection and training requirements for prisoner custody officers. This forms part of the invitation to tender being issued to potential contractors today and a copy has been placed in the Library. Subject to the passage of the Criminal Justice Bill through Parliament and the receipt of satisfactory tenders, we would aim to award a contract in the autumn.

CIVIL SERVICE

Work Experience

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service to what degree civil service trade unions have co-operated in secondment for work experience placements in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Participation in work experience arrangements in the civil service, including the unions' interest in this, is a matter for individual Departments.

In my own Department we have arranged work experience placements for a number of years with the support of unions.

ENERGY

Brown Book

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he will publish his next report on the development of the oil and gas resources of the United Kingdom, the Brown Book.

Mr. Wakeham: I have today published the latest edition of the Brown Book, and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House and the Vote Office. The report provides a detailed account of the development of oil and gas resources during 1990.

ENVIRONMENT

Urban Development Corporations

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will supply for each financial year since 1981 the amount of grant in aid given by his Department to each urban development corporation.

Mr. Key: The table supplies the information.

Grant in aid to UDCs

£ million

UDC	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
London Docklands	30·183	40·587	62·954	58·639	53·616
Merseyside	6·107	20·676	31·870	29·723	28·325

UDC	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
London Docklands	64·881	82·800	116·415	255·750	332·975
Merseyside	27·604	20·942	20·535	23·000	24·000
Black Country	—	2·443	23·000	38·000	32·000
Teesside	—	5·000	20·697	36·009	42·135
Trafford Park	0·031	10·450	15·500	13·300	24·200
Tyne and Wear	—	4·000	24·016	35·800	37·750
Bristol	—	—	0·283	5·000	13·425
Central Manchester	—	—	2·500	11·000	14·000
Leeds	—	—	2·743	8·750	14·000
Sheffield	—	—	7·958	9·500	18·967

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his estimate of the total cost to date of the publication and distribution of poll tax registration forms;

(2) what is his estimate of the total cost of printing and distributing poll tax reminder forms;

(3) what is his estimate of the staffing costs of poll tax registration officers;

(4) what is his estimate of the cost of computer equipment for the administration of poll tax registers.

Mr. Portillo: The Department does not have this information. The Government provided a total of £117·5 million in the 1988-89 and 1989-90 rate support grant settlements in England for community charge preparation costs, including £55 million by way of specific grant. In addition, allocations amounting to a total of £170·3 million were made for capital expenditure in 1988-89 and 1989-90. The cost of collecting the charge was allowed for in the revenue support grant for 1990-91 and will continue to be supported in 1991-92.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of (i) producing and (ii) distributing the booklet sent to all households describing the working of the community charge.

Mr. Portillo: The costs of producing the leaflet "The Community Charge (the so-called poll tax): How it will work for you" which was distributed to every household in England during May 1989 were approximately £370,000. The distribution costs were approximately £600,000.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to date of the printing and issuing of poll tax collection books; and what was the cost of reissuing new poll tax collection notices and books following the Budget changes in poll tax levels.

Mr. Portillo: Information on the cost of printing and issuing community charge collection books is not available. Information on the cost of re-billing following the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act is not yet available, but the Government have undertaken to meet the reasonable additional costs which local authorities incur.

Council Tax (Great Grimsby)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby the numbers in each band qualifying for a reduction in council tax on income grounds in addition to a 25 per cent. discount.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the nature of the calculation by which he arrived at an average council tax of £496 for Grimsby; and if he will list the factors which accounted for only 24 of the 29 authorities with a higher percentage spending over standard spending assessment than Grimsby having higher estimates of tax in each band.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The method used to calculate the illustrative council tax bills published on 23 April is set out on the sheet covering the tables.

The main factors which determine the level of bills shown for each area are the level of spending in relation to standard spending assessment by all authorities providing services in the area; the proportion of properties in each of the seven bands; and the number of discounts assumed to be given in each area.

The exemplifications published on 23 April show over half of domestic properties in Great Grimsby falling in band A, with a bill for two or more adults of £402. Single adult households will receive a 25 per cent. reduction.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Countryside Commission to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: The following table gives the available information. No figures are available prior to 1 April 1982.

Fees paid to management consultants

Year	£
1982-83	—
1983-84	22,057
1984-85	—
1985-86	48,161
1986-87	49,974
1987-88	38,928
1988-89	12,763
1989-90	15,496
1990-91	[1]46,837
1991-92	[2]100,000

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Nature Conservancy Council to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: Expenditure on management consultants is not recorded separately. However, expenditure on all consultancies since 1986-87 is listed. No figures are available for previous years.

	£'000
1986-87	71
1987-88	52
1988-89	150
1989-90	168
1990-91	175
1991-92	[1]90

[1] Nature Conservancy Council for England.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Ordnance Survey to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Baldry: Records in the detail required to provide the information are not available prior to 1985-86. The available information is as follows:

Fees paid to management consultants

Year	£000s
1985-86	276·9
1986-87	200·6
1987-88	236·8
1988-89	220·5
1989-90	242·4
1990-91	241·1

The budget for 1991-92 makes provision of £374,000 for management consultants' fees.

London Population

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment *(a)* what is the current level of population density per acre in London boroughs for planning purposes and *(b)* when it was last reviewed.

Sir George Young: The most recent estimates of population for each London borough are those prepared by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) for mid-1989. The population densities for each borough on that basis are given in column *(A)* of the table. The mid-year population estimates are revised annually by OPCS.

The calculation of population densities for the urban areas of each London borough, excluding the main areas of open land and green belt, are available from the 1981 census. Figures on that basis are given in column *(B)*.

Borough	Population density (persons/acre) (A)	(B)
Barking and Dagenham	106	114
Barnet	86	104
Bexley	89	111
Brent	143	141
Bromley	49	84
Camden	210	183
Croydon	91	101
Ealing	131	124
Enfield	79	119
Greenwich	111	121
Hackney	242	227
Hammersmith and Fulham	227	220
Haringey	156	165
Harrow	94	116
Havering	49	111
Hillingdon	52	69
Hounslow	82	84
Islington	282	262
Kensington and Chelsea	269	259
Kingston	89	99
Lambeth	215	222
Lewisham	161	163
Merton	106	106
Newham	141	146
Redbridge	101	124
Richmond	74	69
Southwark	188	180
Sutton	96	106
Tower Hamlets	205	175
Waltham Forest	131	146
Wandsworth	180	178
Westminster	198	188
City of London	40	42

Sources:
(A) is 1989 mid-year estimate of borough population by OPCS divided by the total area of the borough.
(B) is the 1981 population density of the urban area, ie the "usually resident population" in 1981 divided by the area defined as urban by OPCS in the 1981 census.

Caravan Sites

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities in England which have not yet been designated under the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

Sir George Young: Sixty-three per cent. of local authorities in England are not designated under the Caravan Sites Act 1968. For brevity, I list those authorities which are designated by type of authority.

LONDON BOROUGHS
Barking
Bexley
Camden
Croydon
Enfield
Greenwich
Hammersmith & Fulham
Harrow
Havering
Hillingdon
Islington
Kensington & Chelsea
Kingston upon Thames
Lambeth
Lewisham
Merton
Newham
Redbridge
Richmond upon Thames
Sutton
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster

METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS
Bolton (CB)
Bradford
Bury (CB)
Doncaster
Gateshead
Leeds (CB)
Manchester (CB)
Oldham
Rochdale
St. Helens (CB)
Trafford
Wolverhampton (CB)

COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILS
Avon
None

Bedfordshire
Luton
Mid Bedfordshire
North Bedfordshire
South Bedfordshire

Berkshire
Windsor and Maidenhead

Buckinghamshire
Aylesbury Vale
Chiltern
Milton Keynes
South Buckinghamshire

Cambridgeshire
East Cambridgeshire
Huntingdonshire
Peterborough

Cheshire
Chester

Cleveland
Hartlepool
Middlesbrough
Stockton-on-Tees

Cornwall
None

Cumbria
None

Derbyshire
Bolsover
Chesterfield
High Peak
North East Derbyshire
South Derbyshire

Devon
Plymouth (CB)

Dorset
Bournemouth
Christchurch
East Dorset
North Dorset
Poole
Purbeck
West Dorset
Weymouth and Portland

Durham
Chester-le-Street
Darlington
Derwentside
Durham
Easington
Sedgefield
Teesdale
Wear Valley

East Sussex
Eastbourne
Hastings
Lewes
Rother
Wealden

Essex
None

Gloucestershire
None

Hampshire
None

Hereford and Worcester
None

Hertfordshire
Broxbourne
Dacorum
Hertsmere
Watford
Welwyn Hatfield

Humberside
None

Isle of Wight
None

Kent
Ashford
Canterbury
Dartford
Dover
Gravesham
Maidstone
Shepway
Tonbridge and Malling

Lancashire
Hyndburn
Lancaster

Leicestershire
Blaby
Oadby and Wigston

Lincolnshire
Boston
Lincoln (CB)
West Lindsey

Norfolk
Great Yarmouth

Northamptonshire
East Northamptonshire
Kettering
Northampton
South Northamptonshire
Wellingborough

Northumberland
Alnwich
Berwick-Upon-Tweed
Blyth Valley
Castle Morpeth
Tynedale
Wansbeck

North Yorkshire
Richmondshire
Ryedale
Selby

Nottinghamshire
None

Oxfordshire
Cherwell
Oxford (CB)

Shropshire
Oswestry

Somerset
None

Staffordshire
Stoke-on-Trent (CB)

Suffolk
Babergh
Ipswich
Mid-Suffolk
Suffolk Coastal

Surrey
Epsom and Ewell
Runnymede

Warwickshire
Nuneaton and Bedworth

West Sussex
Adur
Arun
Chichester
Crawley
Horsham
Mid Sussex
Worthing

Wiltshire
Kennet
North Wiltshire
Salisbury
Thamesdown
West Wiltshire

Note: Those districts marked (CB) were designated as county boroughs and there have been subsequent boundary changes.

Planning Applications

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local authority planning refusals have been overruled by an inspector in the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: In the 12-month period ending February 1991, 32·3 per cent of appeals to the Secretary of State, following a local authority decision to refuse a planning application, were allowed.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to afford the same rights to those who object to a planning application as apply to property developers when an appeal by the developers is made to him following refusal of planning consent by a local authority.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend is required by statute to take into account any representations about planning appeals made to him by third parties, so long as they are relevant to the case, regardless of the procedure followed. Although most third parties appear at a public local inquiry only at the inspector's discretion, inspectors are instructed not to refuse to hear such parties without good reason, particularly if the result of the inquiry could adversely affect their interests.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has any plans to compensate local authorities for the money they spend to defend their planning decisions;

(2) what steps he takes to ensure that the amount of money spent by local authorities to defend their decisions is justified and reasonable; and if he will give figures for the amount spent by each local authority for 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Sir George Young: It is for local authorities to decide how much to spend on defending their planning decisions at appeal. Information is not available about the amount spent by each authority in the last three years. Fees for planning applications are set to recover about 50 per cent. of authorities' development control costs, which include costs incurred at appeal, and those fees are being raised progressively with the aim of covering 100 per cent. of development control costs. Where unreasonable behaviour by another party at a public local inquiry results in unnecessary expense to a local planning authority my right hon. Friend may award costs to the authority. Fifty-four such awards were made in 1989-90.

HEALTH

Female Circumcision

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make funding available for courses for doctors and nurses for in-service training to help deal with the physical and psychological consequences of female circumcision.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 25 March, at columns *322-24*. It is for the health authorities concerned to provide funding for in-service training.

Medical Staff (South Manchester Health Authority)

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* junior doctors, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* nurses were employed by the South Manchester health authority in March 1979 and March 1991, respectively.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table shows the figures for 1982 and 1989, the earliest and latest years for which comparable information is available.

South Manchester health authority as at 30 September each year[1]

	1982	*1989*
Junior Doctors[2]	230	260
Consultants	140	150
Nursing and Midwifery Staff[3]	3,030	3,110

Notes:
[1] All figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
[2] Staff included: Registrars, Senior House Officers, House Officers (excluding all locum staff). Senior Registrar figures are not available at a district level.
[3] Includes Agency Staff.

Hospital Beds, South London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the number of beds available (i) to NHS patients and (ii) private patients in *(a)* Guy's hospital, *(b)* King's College hospital, *(c)* St. Thomas's hospital, *(d)* Lewisham and North Southwark health authority, *(e)* Camberwell health authority and *(f)* West Lambeth health authority at the beginning of each financial year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

Departmental Land, London

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much land his Department owns in London; and how much of that land is unused.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department does not own land in London. At 31 March 1990—the latest figures available—the NHS owned approximately 1,700 hectares of land in the Greater London area, of which approximately 400 hectares had been identified as surplus to requirements.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to commission a report on the likely total job losses in opting-out hospitals in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. Trusts are in the vanguard of the shift away from central control. They have the capacity and capability to use their new-found freedoms for the benefit of their patients.

Patient Referrals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what machinery exists to deal with disputes between purchasing health authorities and non budget-holding general practitioners over the appropriateness or otherwise of referrals of patients for treatment by hospitals with which the purchasers do not have contracts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It has always been recognised that GPs will sometimes wish to refer a patient to a hospital or service with which the patient's district health authority (DHA) has no contract in place. District health authorities have been asked to plan to take account of this and are holding reserves of funds to meet the cost of expected levels of these referrals.

Mrs. Bottomley: District health authorities would not generally be expected to challenge such referrals, unless they were clearly perverse or wholly unjustified on clinical grounds. However, DHAs would have to make a judgment on the relative priority of providing funding for the treatment. In an emergency, treatment will always be provided immediately and the cost met by the DHA. In non-urgent cases, DHAs will be expected to fund treatment as quickly as available resources allow, taking account of the clinical priority of the individual case.

Clinical Treatment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's plans for dealing with those cases whereby national health service patients registered with budget-holding general practitioners are denied access to clinical treatment which is still available to those registered with non budget-holding practitioners; if he will take steps to prevent further such occurrences; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Fundholding practices are responsible for purchasing a defined range of hospital treatment for their patients. For treatment not included in this range, their patients are covered by the relevant district health authority's contract. Fundholding practices are allocated budgets which have as their starting point previous hospital usage and prescribing patterns. They are neither preferentially funded nor disadvantaged compared with district health authorities.

WALES

Computerised Systems

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if general practitioners have achieved the target set by his Department of 80 per cent. making use of computerised systems by April 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is believed that the target set, in "Agenda for Action", to have 80 per cent. of general practices in Wales computerised, has not been achieved. The current estimate is 60 to 65 per cent. computerised. The position will be confirmed through a survey of general practice computerisation presently being undertaken in England and Wales by the Department of Health. To achieve the target figures, GPs will need to be encouraged to computerise their practices. Computerisation is being promoted by:

(a) the two GP computing advisers for Wales and family health service authority (FHSAs) IT officers.
(b) proposed changes to the direct reimbursement scheme for GP practice computerisation to make it more flexible, and by devolving funds for managing the scheme from the Welsh Office to FHSAs.
(c) the GP computing project which aims, over a three-year period, to increase and co-ordinate the spread and utilisation of general practice computing in Wales.

Open-heart Surgery Centre

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of those hospitals currently being considered as the second open-heart surgery centre in south Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information concerning the provision of a second cardiac facility will be announced when we have fully considered all appropriate options.

Earlswood Roundabout (Traffic Lights)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the criteria he has used to determine delaying the installation of temporary traffic lights at the Earlswood roundabout until 1993.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The traffic signals are to be provided as part of an improvement to Earlswood roundabout and will be permanent, operating on a part-time basis at peak periods. The roundabout is being used as a temporary access for the M4 construction between Earlswood and Lonlas. Should the improvement and the traffic lights be installed now, serious contractual problems would result.

Road Improvements

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated total spending on major improvement schemes by his Department on *(a)* the A55 trunk road and *(b)* the M4 for each year since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Expenditure on major improvement schemes, including schemes completed, in progress and in preparation, for each year since 1979 is:

£ million

	A55	*M4*
1979-80	6·3	25·2
1980-81	17·4	21·6
1981-82	15·0	16·0
1982-83	57·0	8·3
1983-84	63·4	7·6
1984-85	39·4	3·5
1985-86	30·6	3·1
1986-87	34·7	1·1
1987-88	63·6	2·7
1988-89	86·2	1·8
1989-90	60·7	1·8
1990-91 [1]	72·1	2·2
Total	546·4	94·9

[1] Provisional.

Unfit Meat

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library, for each of the last five years, the number of bovine animals that his veterinary officers have found to contain prohibited artificial substances rendering the meat unfit for human consumption; what is the nature of the substances; and what is the number of prosecutions which followed.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on this matter is held centrally. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be placing a note in the Library of the House containing the details for Great Britain.

Agriculture Prices

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the price levels of primary agricultural products in Wales over the last 15 years.

Mr. David Hunt: Prices for five products are shown in the following tables:

Calendar year	*Wheat*	*Barley*
	Average price (£ per tonne)	
1976	n/a	n/a
1977	78·00	75·20
1978	81·30	77·10
1979	94·00	90·80
1980	95·50	91·50
1981	106·00	98·40
1982	110·70	107·80
1983	121·80	118·70
1984	108·37	116·16
1985	110·01	105·67
1986	113·65	108·34
1987	112·38	103·74
1988	109·14	103·04
1989	121·83	106·89
1990	[1]133·69	[1]113·78

Financial year	*Milk Average net price paid to wholesale producers (p per litre)*	*Finished cattle Average market price (p per kg—deadweight)*	*Finished sheep Average market price (p per kg—deadweight)*
1976-77	9·16	n/a	n/a
1977-78	9·72	n/a	n/a
1978-79	10·31	68·34	142·26
1979-80	11·28	75·97	138·02
1980-81	12·44	76·24	125·88
1981-82	13·46	91·37	155·48
1982-83	14·60	95·38	145·88
1983-84	14·87	94·82	143·45
1984-85	14·97	94·05	167·33
1985-86	15·63	93·75	169·85
1986-87	16·05	93·79	170·32
1987-88	16·60	99·01	185·19
1988-89	17·94	110·71	171·71
1989-90	19·14	113·15	182·80
1990-91	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] = provisional

n/a = Not available. In 1976 and 1976-77 this indicates the figures are not available on a comparable basis; when indicated for 1990-91 the figures are not yet available.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for public consultation on his second phase of the review of the all-Wales strategy for the development of services for people with a mental handicap; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We intend to publish shortly outline proposals for the future development of services for people with mental handicaps in Wales. There will be a period of public consultation on them until the late summer, including discussions with each county planning team during June and July. We will very much welcome comments from service users and their families and all others with an interest.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the timetable for the review of the all-Wales strategy for his development of services for people with a mental handicap.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The formal review of the all-Wales strategy for the development of services for people with mental handicaps was launched on 26

November 1990, and comments were invited by 22 February 1991. Almost 120 written responses were received, and we are currently considering how the strategy might be taken forward beyond the original 10 years, which will end in March 1993.

The second round of public consultation, following the publication shortly of our outline proposals, will last until the late summer. We intend to make a final announcement about the arrangements for further development of services before the end of the year.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list *(a)* the total number of jobs created or safeguarded in Wales and *(b)* the location and number of jobs between June 1987 and May 1990;

(2) what is his estimate of *(a)* the total number of jobs created or safeguarded in Wales and *(b)* the locations and numbers of jobs since May 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department. However, the following table shows, for each county, the total jobs expected to be created and/or safeguarded on projects associated with offers of regional selective assistance (RSA) and revised regional development grants (RDG) made during the periods 1 June 1987 to 31 May 1990 and 1 June 1990 to 29 April 1991.

The table also shows totals of jobs achieved on projects which have attracted regional selective assistance since 1972 and revised regional development grants since 1984.

	1 June 1987 to 31 May 1990 forecast	*1 June 1990 to 29 April 1991 forecast*	*Totals achieved*
Clwyd	19,745	2,124	30,244
Dyfed	4,121	325	7,113
Gwent	13,113	2,885	36,371
Gwynedd	1,118	725	3,511
Mid Glamorgan	21,178	8,253	35,806
Powys	332	2	3,140
South Glamorgan	6,727	630	9,278
West Glamorgan	9,443	1,670	14,300
Total	75,507	16,614	139,763

Ambulance Service

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to change the structure and organisation of the ambulance service in Wales, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The structure and organisation of patient transport services in Wales are currently being examined by independent consultants commissioned by the Department. I will consult widely on their recommendations before deciding whether to make any changes.

District General Hospitals

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all district general hospitals in Wales and provide for each *(a)* the total establishment and *(b)* the actual number of employees in post on 1 April, in each case giving the total figure and the breakdown by categories including (i) consultants, (ii) junior hospital doctors, (iii) senior nurses and nurse managers, (iv) nurses, (v) auxiliary staff, (vi) MLSOs and (vii) other categories of staff.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The available information, which relates to staff in pay units associated with DGHs, is given in the table. Staff establishment figures are not available centrally and medical and dental staff in post figures are not available below district health authority level.

Staff in post (numbers) as at 31 March 1991

District general hospital	*Senior nurses and nurse managers*[1]	*Other qualified nursing and midwifery staff*	*Nursing and midwifery auxiliaries*	*Ancillary staff*	*MLSOs*	*Other staff*	*Total*
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	3	408	97	242	47	396	1,193
Ysbyty Maelor	5	826	207	299	49	536	1,922
Bronglais General	—	202	47	107	18	152	526
West Wales General	2	392	196	287	31	300	1,208
Royal Gwent	3	751	210	428	77	559	2,028
St. Woolos	1	314	191	234	—	240	980
Nevill Hall	12	447	124	248	35	360	1,226
Ysbyty Gwynedd	1	474	124	311	—	317	1,227
Princess of Wales/ Bridgend General	3	548	142	302	47	357	1,399
East Glamorgan General	1	559	116	271	62	320	1,329
Prince Charles	1	361	56	225	39	300	982
Withybush	—	266	49	—	29	212	556
University Hospital of Wales/Dental Hospital	5	959	219	641	2	974	2,800
Cardiff Royal Infirmary	2	470	146	265	—	244	1,127
Llandough	1	358	131	259	—	368	1,117
Singleton	2	361	46	316	—	231	956
Morriston	4	987	217	173	39	524	1,944
Neath	1	417	52	248	29	265	1,012

[1] Includes midwives.

Note: Not all staff will work wholly at the hospitals with which they are included and staff in other units may work part of their time at the hospitals listed.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Welsh Development Agency to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 1 May 1991.

Advertising

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure by the Welsh Office in 1990-91 on *(a)* press advertising, *(b)* television advertising and *(c)* other advertising and promotion.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 25 April 1991, at columns *537-40*.

Dentists

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists were employed in the national health service in each county in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many are currently employed.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the number of dentists[1] employed in the national health service in the years 1985 to 1989—the latest available data—is given in the table.

County	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Clwyd	113	114	122	122	137
Dyfed	104	107	112	118	115
Gwent	139	139	145	146	151
Gwynedd	81	81	81	77	80
Mid-Glamorgan	149	151	158	160	164
Powys	39	44	44	44	45
South Glamorgan	221	214	219	215	220
West Glamorgan	146	142	145	153	157

[1] General dental practitioners, including assistants, as at 1 October, community dental staff as at 30 September and hospital dental staff, excluding hospital practitioners and clinical assistants, as at 30 September.

Wind Farms

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide policy guidelines on the creation, siting and construction of wind farms in rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Detailed planning guidance on renewable energy, including wind farms, is being prepared.

Health Service (Advertising)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the amount devoted to the national health service in Wales and *(b)* the percentage of expenditure under each heading that was devoted to the national health service in Wales in each of the six years 1985-86 to 1990-91 in respect of his Department's expenditure on (i) press and advertising, (ii) television advertising and (iii) other advertising and promotion.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows:

Gross expenditure on the NHS

Years	*£ million*
1985-86	953
1986-87	1,025
1987-88	1,135
1988-89	1,270
1989-90	1,376
1990-91	1,554

Health advertising expenditure as a percentage of total Welsh Office advertising expenditure

	Percentage	
	1989-90	*1990-91*
(i) Press	0·85	—
(ii) TV	92·98	41·18
(iii) Other	17·01	31·01

Note: Figures for expenditure on advertising for the years prior to 1989-90 are not available.

Hospitals (Trust Status)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those hospitals in Wales which have *(a)* asked for information about the process and implications of transfer to trust status, *(b)* expressed interest in transferring to trust status and *(c)* communicated to him or his officials a wish or intention to seek approval for transfer to trust status.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The decision on whether to apply for self-governing status is a matter for individual health service units. To date, only Pembrokeshire has indicated its intention to apply to become a national health service trust. The potential development of trusts elsewhere in Wales will become known only when formal expressions of interest have been submitted.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Additionality

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the ministerial meeting concerning additionality of funds held between himself and European Commissioner Millan on 25 April.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what conclusion he came to after his meeting with Commissioner Bruce Millan on additionality.

Mr. Lilley: With my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and other Ministers, I met Mr. Bruce Millan, European Commissioner with responsibility for regional policies, on Thursday 25 April to discuss issues relating to the Community's structural funds.

We discussed a range of issues concerning the funds' grants in the United Kingdom, as well as broader matters relating to the future of the funds.

The proposed RECHAR programmes of grants for United Kingdom coalfield areas were one of the subjects discussed. The meeting helped reduce the misunderstanding there has been about the additionality of Community grants. I remain in touch with the Commission and hope that agreement will now soon be reached to enable these useful programmes to proceed.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Sainsbury: The figures are as follows:

	£000
1986-87	382
1987-88	365
1988-89	719
1989-90	691
[1]1990-91	581
[2]1991-92	673

[1] Provisional.
[2] Budget (provisional).

Notes:
1. Comparable figures for the years before 1986-87 are not readily available.
2. The figures exclude fees paid to professional advisers in connection with the proposed privatisation of the short term insurance business of ECGD.

Personal Sequestration

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress being made by his Department on its investigation on the operation of the system of personal sequestration in Scotland; and if he will list those persons and organisations so far consulted.

Mr. Redwood: The evaluation is in its final stages. Officials have discussed the operation of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 with various organisations and individuals, but there has been no formal consultation process. Those who have helped include:

Citizens Advice Scotland
Money Advice Scotland
The Consumer Credit Association of the UK
The Credit Services Association
The Scottish Courts Administration
The Accountant in Bankruptcy
Professor William McBryde of Dundee University
A. M. Hamilton of McGregor Donald
Messrs. Pannell Kerr Foster
Messrs. Cork Gully
Adam Berkley of Watson Personal Finance
The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland

I have also received, or had forwarded to me, representations on the subject from other organisations and individuals, including:

The Radio, Electrical and Television Retailers Association
Geoffrey Ognall of Legal & Trade
Mrs. Maria Stepek
N. Firestone, Firestone Wilson

Soviet Union Export Credits

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the availability of medium-term cover to the Soviet Union from the Export Credits Guarantee Department for the use of British exporters.

Mr. Sainsbury: ECGD cover for medium-term export credits for the Soviet Union is currently being reviewed and new commitments are not being undertaken pending the outcome of the review.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries which at present offer medium-term cover export credits for business with the Soviet Union and those which do not.

Mr. Sainsbury: As far as is known, all OECD members are presently offering cover for medium-term export credits for the Soviet Union with the exception of Sweden, which is postponing decisions on new applications.

Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contacts he has had with the chairman and chief executive of Sun Alliance regarding its proposed bid for the Insurance Services Group of ECGD.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such contacts.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provision he made to establish a reserve price for net proceeds to the Exchequer from the sale of the Insurance Services Group of ECGD.

Mr. Sainsbury: Price will be an important but not the sole criterion in decisions about the sale of the short-term business of ECGD.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the dates on which the management team of *(a)* Assicurazioni Generali, *(b)* NCM, *(c)* Trade Indemnity and *(d)* any other bidders visited Cardiff with a view to preparing bids for the Insurance Services Group of ECGD.

Mr. Sainsbury: Visits to Cardiff were offered to each of the management teams of the companies invited to tender for the short-term business of ECGD. The dates on which those visits took place were as follows:

	Date
Trade Indemnity	3 April
Sun Alliance	4 April
Assicurazioni Generali	10 April
NCM	16 April
COBAC	17 April

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what facilities were given to representatives of the appropriate trade unions to meet the management of Assuricazioni Generali, NCM, COBAC, Eagle Star, Sun Alliance and Trade Indemnity during their exploratory visits to ECGD, Cardiff, prior to finalising their bids for the Insurance Services Group.

Mr. Sainsbury: Each of the shortlisted companies invited to bid for the short-term business of ECGD was invited by Government to meet representatives of the appropriate trade unions during their visit to Cardiff. Each company which visited Cardiff had such a meeting.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conveniently available figures he has of the number of contract staff currently working for Scottish Natural

Heritage; and what steps are being taken to ensure that the reservoir of expertise among those who worked on contract for the Nature Conservancy Council in Scotland has been kept available for Scottish Natural Heritage.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At present there are 65 contract staff working for the Nature Conservancy Council in Scotland and 19 contract staff working for the Countryside Commission for Scotland.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill, it is hoped that Scottish Natural Heritage will be established on 1 April 1992. Staff on contracts with the predecessor bodies with termination dates after 1 April 1992 will have their contracts honoured. Scottish Natural Heritage will also be able to appoint or re-appoint contract staff where appropriate. Decisions on staff levels and structures will be taken later this year.

Local Tax Exemplifications

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a detailed note on the methodology and valuation estimates used to produce his recent local tax exemplifications for Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Details of the basis of calculation of the exemplifications were provided in a note that accompanied the figures. If the hon. Member has any specific queries not covered in the note, I would be happy to respond to them.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information is held by the district valuer on capital valuation of domestic properties in *(a)* the public and *(b)* the private sector in Scotland; and if any other section of the Inland Revenue provided capital valuation information for his recent exemplifications for a local tax in Scotland.

Mr. Maples: I have been asked to reply.

The valuation office Scotland holds for valuation and land ownership purposes information about various types of property, including a record of all sales of heritable property obtained from the public records or the Department of Registers of Scotland. No other part of the Revenue provided capital valuation information to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Urban Motorways

Mr. David Marshall: to ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total mileage of urban motorway in each urban area of Scotland *(a)* already constructed and in operation, *(b)* under construction at present and *(c)* planned for the future.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of public road lengths by region and class as at 1 April 1990 are given in table 5.2 of "Scottish Transport Statistics 1989". The figures for Strathclyde region include 47 km of motorway within the Glasgow city boundary. As urban motorways are the responsibility of local roads authorities, their construction and planning are dependent on local authority processing of statutory procedures and availability of finance. These plans are subject to change. Currently under construction by Strathclyde region is 4·6 km of non-trunk urban motorway—part of the M80 Stepps bypass, which is a joint scheme with the Scottish Office.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Forestry Commission to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission does not keep a separate record of fees paid to consultants. A general search of the relevant files has identified only one occasion when consultants were employed to advise on management questions. That was in 1984, at a cost of £17,000. The commission has no current plans to employ management consultants.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Scottish Development Agency to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise, which succeeded the Scottish Development Agency on 1 April 1991, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Legal Aid

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: to ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the Scottish population is today eligible for *(a)* legal advice and assistance and *(b)* civil legal aid; and what was the figure in 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Pupil Expenditure

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the expenditure per pupil on (i) books and (ii) equipment in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in cash and real terms since 1976.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* Information from 1977, the earliest year for which details are available in the form requested, is given in the tables, which have been compiled from local authority financial returns. Expenditure on equipment was not separately identified in these returns until 1982-83. There have been some variations from year to year in the recording of expenditure under these two headings. It is therefore possible that some expenditure on books may be included under expenditure on equipment and vice versa.

Expenditure per pupil on text and library books and on educational tools· equipment and materials at outturn prices

	Books		*Education Tools, Equipment and Materials*	
Year	*Primary (£)*	*Secondary (£)*	*Primary (£)*	*Secondary (£)*
1977-78	3·27	5·80	n/a	n/a
1978-79	4·54	8·31	n/a	n/a
1979-80	5·49	9·61	n/a	n/a
1980-81	5·84	9·29	n/a	n/a
1981-82	6·54	9·77	n/a	n/a
1982-83	7·03	10·03	8·18	27·33

Year	Books		Education Tools, Equipment and Materials	
	Primary (£)	Secondary (£)	Primary (£)	Secondary (£)
1983-84	8·99	3·35	7·28	25·36
1984-85	9·55	13·83	8·91	30·09
1985-86	8·91	13·47	8·33	30·26
1986-87	10·93	16·67	8·92	33·85
1987-88	9·25	12·93	11·71	44·42
1988-89	11·23	18·56	13·24	50·18

Expenditure per pupil on text and library books and on educational tools, equipment and materials adjusted to 1989-90 prices using the GDP deflator

Year	Books		Education Tools, Equipment and Materials	
	Primary (£)	Secondary (£)	Primary (£)	Secondary (£)
1977-78	8·49	15·06	n/a	n/a
1978-79	10·63	19·46	n/a	n/a
1979-80	11·02	19·28	n/a	n/a
1980-81	9·90	15·75	n/a	n/a
1981-82	10·11	15·11	n/a	n/a
1982-83	10·15	14·48	11·81	39·46
1983-84	12·41	18·42	10·05	35·00
1984-85	12·54	18·16	11·70	39·52
1985-86	11·10	16·78	10·38	37·69
1986-87	13·16	20·07	10·74	40·75
1987-88	10·57	14·78	13·38	50·77
1988-89	11·95	19·74	14·08	53·38

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Overseas Development Administration to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 1 May.

Food Aid (EC)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons Her Majesty's Government's representative opposed the European Commission proposal on the funding of the EC's 400,000 tonnes of food aid for Africa, at the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of Member States on 23 April; and if he will make it his policy to end Her Majesty's Government's opposition to the proposal in order to secure a COREPER decision on funding at its meeting on 2 May.

Mrs. Chalker: We endorsed during last week's discussions in COREPER the proposal of the EC Commission to make available an extra 400,000 tonnes of EC food aid for the relief of famine in Africa. We proposed that the food aid should be sent to Africa this week and the funding sorted out later. I wrote to Commissioner Marin earlier this week making the same point. I hope that agreement can be reached at COREPER today.

Kurds

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, on 25 April, *Official Report*, columns *507-8*, if he will list those supplies which were donated to the Overseas Development Administration and give details of the organisations which made such donations.

Mrs. Chalker: The following relief supplies on aircraft chartered by ODA were donated:

Supplies	Donor
2,500 groundsheets	Salvation Army
120,000 blankets	Mersey Regional Health Authority
216,000 multivitamin capsules	Nature Slim UK

The other supplies on ODA flights were purchased by the ODA from various suppliers, including some non-governmental organisations. The ODA also paid the costs of chartering the Oxfam flight on 22 April, carrying two Land Rovers and drinking water supply equipment. In addition, a further flight has gone to Iran carrying goods donated by the public.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kuwait

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what time, GMT and local, the British ambassador to Kuwait first learnt of the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi forces on 2 August 1990; at what time, GMT and locally, he was aware of the attack on the royal palace; and how far the palace is from his residence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 November 1990, at column 136. At approximately 03.00 GMT, 06.00 Kuwait local time, on 2 August the ambassador became aware of an Iraqi attack on the royal palace, which is less than a quarter of a mile from the ambassador's residence.

Trilogue Meeting

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on how the 1 billion ecu of new resources for EC external purposes should be allocated by the trilogue meeting on 2 May.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The trilogue on 2 May will discuss proposed revisions to the financial prespectives for both 1991 and 1992. We are participating constructively in the Council perparations for this trilogue. We shall continue to press the need for additional provisions to be fully justified.

Safe Havens

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy of widening safe havens.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are continuing with our policy for the establishment of safe havens. Work on the camp at Zakho is well advanced and preparations are being made for further safe havens.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Post

Mr. Steen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps to ensure that post which arrrives for an hon. Member at the House Post Office is delivered the same say at hon. Members' offices outside the main building.

Mr. MacGregor: I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to look into the matter and he will contact the hon. Member.

DEFENCE

Recruits (Minimum Age)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum age for recruits for the Royal Marines and RAF; and how long this has been so.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The minimum age for recruitment to the Royal Marines and RAF is as follows:

	Males	*Females*
Royal Marines		
Officers	17 years 6 months	—
Servicemen	16 years	—
Royal Air Force		
Officers	17 years 6 months	18 years
Servicemen	16 years 6 months	17 years

In the time available, it has not been possible to ascertain precisely how long the age limits have been in force. The minimum age for RM service men is believed to have increased to 16 with the raising of the school leaving age in 1972. In the RAF, the current minimum age limits for officers and airwomen have been in place since at least 1967. The minimum recruitment age for airmen has been 16 years 6 months since 1981. Between 1967 and 1980 it varied between 16, 16 years 6 months and 17.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the sites currently being considered for interim disposal of *(a)* HMS Warspite *(b)* HMS Churchill and *(c)* HMS Conqueror;

(2) what research his Department currently is undertaking into cutting up reactors from decommissioned nuclear fleet submarines in a contained environment.

Mr. Alan Clark: A number of options are currently under consideration for the method and location of the interim storage and eventual disposal of decommissioned nuclear submarines.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with his NATO counterparts regarding the disposal of nuclear fleet submarines after decommissioning.

Mr. Alan Clark: There is a regular exchange of information between the United States and United Kingdom Governments under the 1958 mutual defence agreement and we are generally aware of each other's views. The only other NATO member operating nuclear submarines is France, with whom we have held no substantive discussions on the subject.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the independent expert members of the nuclear-powered warship safety committee who have specific expertise in *(a)* reactor safety and *(b)* decommissioning of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: The membership of the nuclear-powered warship safety committee is confidential.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he makes it his policy to rule out the disposal of decommissioned nuclear fleet submarines at sea.

Mr. Alan Clark: A number of options are currently under consideration for the method and location of the interim storage and eventual disposal of decommissioned nuclear submarines. But the Government are keeping under review whether the option of disposing of large decommissioned items at sea needs to be maintained.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what joint research with other NATO countries his Department has commissioned in the last 10 years regarding disposal of nuclear fleet submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: None.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of all Z-berth sites in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: United Kingdom Z-berths, including buoys and anchorages, are at:

Barrow-in-Furness
Barry
Broadford Bay
Brodick Bay
Campbeltown
Cardiff
Coulport
Dales Voe
Devonport and Plymouth Sound
Faslane
The Firth of Forth
Glen Mallan
Holy Loch
Lamlash Bay
Lerwick
Liverpool
Loch Ewe
Loch Fyne
Loch Goil
Loch Long
Loch Na Beiste
Loch Striven
Portland
Portree
Portsmouth
Raasay
Rosyth
Rothesay
Southampton
Spithead
Thurso Bay
Torbay

In addition, we have decided to establish a Z-berth at Swansea.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the longest estimated half-life of components inside the reactors of *(a)* HMS Conqueror, *(b)* HMS Churchill and *(c)* HMS Warspite.

Mr. Alan Clark: Components as such do not have half-lives. The term half-life is associated with the radioactive decay of individual isotopes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum number of decommissioned nuclear fleet submarines which can be laid up at *(a)* Devonport and *(b)* Rosyth without taking away berths which would otherwise be used by operational ships at those sites.

Mr. Alan Clark: There would be sufficient berths at Rosyth and Devonport to store all decommissioned nuclear submarines for the foreseeable future without penalty to operations.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the moratorium of the London dumping convention is binding in respect of disposal of decommissioned nuclear fleet submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the formal decommissioning of HMS Conqueror will now take place.

Mr. Alan Clark: HMS Conqueror was formally decommissioned from Royal Navy service on 31 December 1990. The first stage of decommissioning, in the separate sense that the word is applied to radioactive facilities, will begin shortly.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aspects of the material condition of *(a)* HMS Warspite, *(b)* HMS Churchill and *(c)* HMS Conqueror contributed to the decision to decommission them.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our normal practice to comment on the material state of individual submarines. Whilst the material state of ships and submarines is taken into account when decisions are taken to decommission them, it was not a major factor in the decisions to decommission Warspite, Churchill and Conqueror except in the general sense that they were among the Royal Navy's older and therefore less capable submarines.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department is giving to the potential safety implications of the technical defect discovered in HMS Warspite at the end of 1989 in respect of the options for interim disposal of decommissioned nuclear fleet submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: The technical defect discovered in HMS Warspite has no bearing on the options for the decommissioning and disposal of the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered submarines.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the existing Z-berth sites are being considered as options for interim disposal of decommissioned nuclear fleet submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: None.

Ministry of Defence Land (London)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much land his Department owns in London; and how much of that land is unused.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Ministry of Defence currently holds the freehold interest to 1,232 hectares—3,045 acres—in the Greater London area, of which 20 hectares—42 acres—is unused and available for disposal. A further 32 hectares—79 acres—is occupied by the Ministry of Defence on leasehold terms.

Foxhunter Radar

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Foxhunter radar systems have been delivered to the RAF, and how many of the delivered systems meet the RAF's minimum operational requirement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Of a total of 200 radars on order, 183 have been delivered to the RAF for installation in Tornado F3s, all of which have been cleared for service use.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current status of the Foxhunter radar procurement programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Development of stage 1 of the two-stage improvement programme has now been completed and modification of in-service radars is well under way. Development of stage 2 is expected to be completed this year.

Defence Budget

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy regarding the release of information on the long-term costings of the defence budget.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The 10-year costing of the defence programme—known as the long-term costing—is designed for internal planning purposes. Approval to commit expenditure is subject to separate procedures and endorsement by Ministers as appropriate. To avoid giving a misleading impression as to the firmness of our plans we would not therefore normally provide details of the contents of the long-term costing.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by when it is intended that the results of the "Options for Change" study will be fully implemented.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We intend to move to new force structures by the mid-1990s.

EH101 Helicopters

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to procure a utility variant of the EH101 helicopter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are considering the results of the project definition phase of the utility EH101. As I explained to the House on 22 January this year, the analysis is taking longer than expected because of the need to take into account the implications of changes in Europe.

International Arms Register

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given by his Department to the possibility of establishing an international arms register.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has stated his support for a United Nations arms transfer register. My Department is working with all other interested Departments to further this important initiative. In parallel, my Department has supplied the chairman for a United Nations experts study group which will be reporting shortly to the Secretary General on measures to promote arms transfer transparency including the setting up of an international arms transfer register.

Ballykelly Army Base

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a file has been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland regarding allegations that a fraud ring operated at Ballykelly Army base in recent years during contract work for the Army.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.
I understand that police inquiries are continuing.

EMPLOYMENT

Offshore Pipeline Valves

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the 193 valves required to be fitted as a result of Offshore Installations (Emergency Pipe-line Valve) Regulations 1989 were fitted as at 31 March.

Mr. Forth: As at 31 March 1991, 164 of the total 192 emergency shutdown valves had been fitted or relocated in compliance with the Offshore Installations (Emergency Pipeline Valve) Regulations 1989. Of the 28 valves remaining at 31 March, 25 of them are in the Brent field and all the associated pipelines are shut down pending installation of the valves.

British Tourist Authority

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total sum paid out in fees by the British Tourist Authority to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Forth: These matters are the responsibility of the board of the British Tourist Authority, and I am asking the chairman to write directly to the hon. Gentleman.

Ford Car Factory

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will assess the effect on the level of unemployment on Merseyside of the proposed reduction in employment in the Ford car factory.

Mr. Forth: I have no plans to make such an assessment. The company has announced a reduction in staffing of 2,800 at its Halewood plant to be phased in over several years, and to be achieved in the main by natural wastage, early retirement and voluntary redundancy.

The normal range of services and facilities of the Department and of the employment service will be available to Ford employees who lose their jobs.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the change in income tax in 1991-92 as against the 1978-79 indexed regime, broken down into the top 1 per cent., 5 per cent., 10 per cent. and bottom 50 per cent. of taxpayers showing the total change and the average gain.

Mr. Maude: Latest estimates of the annual change in income tax liability resulting from the changes in tax rates, allowances, and thresholds are in the table. The 1978-79 income tax regime has been indexed to 1991-92 levels by reference to the statutory formula, and allowing for independent taxation.

For the purposes of these calculations, the indexed regime 1978-79 has been applied directly to the income base of 1991-92. In practice, retention of the 1978-79 regime, indexed as appropriate, for the intervening years would have led to changes in the income base.

Reductions in income tax per individual[1] in 1991-92 compared with the 1978-79 indexed regime

Quantile group of individual taxpayers	*Total reductions 1991-92 prices*	*Average reduction at 1991-92 prices*
	£ million	*£*
Top 1 per cent.	8,600	30,900
Top 5 per cent.	12,500	9,000
Top 10 per cent.	15,000	5,400
Bottom 50 per cent.	4,000	300
All taxpayers	28,700	1,000

[1] Individuals liable to income tax under the 1978-79 indexed regime.

I regret that my reply to a related question on 15 April 1991, at columns *13-14*, was incorrect. The corrected table is as follows.

Average reduction in income tax per individual in 1991-92 compared with 1978-79 indexed regime

Range of individual's income in 1991-92 £	*Average reduction at 1991-92 income levels* £
Under 5,000	130
5,000-10,000	350
10,000-15,000	650
15,000-20,000	950
20,000-25,000	1,300
25,000-30,000	1,700
30,000-40,000	2,400
40,000-50,000	3,800
50,000-60,000	6,300
60,000-70,000	9,800
over 70,000	38,600
Total	1,000

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of introducing an

alternative minimum tax of *(a)* 20 per cent. and *(b)* 25 per cent. of gross income on all taxpayers with a gross income over (i) £40,000, (ii) £45,000 and (iii) £50,000 a year.

Mr. Maude: The information is as follows:

Additional tax liability arising from introduction of alternative minimum tax on gross income: 1991-92

Gross income of individual taxpayer (£)	*Rate of minimum tax*	
	20 per cent. £ million	*25 per cent. £ million*
Over 40,000	40	225
Over 45,000	30	115
Over 50,000	25	80

The estimates do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the new arrangements.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of a 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate of income tax; and what would be the cumulative effect after five years of an additional 1 per cent. cut each year, assuming indexation of the current structure of income tax.

Mr. Maude: A one penny cut in the basic rate of income tax in 1991-92 would have a direct revenue cost of about £1·9 billion in 1991-92 and £2·0 billion in 1992-93. The cost in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income would also be about £1·9 billion. Costs of changes in later years will depend on the growth of income.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 of introducing higher rate bands of income tax equal to 45 per cent. on taxable incomes from £30,200 to £36,700 and 50 per cent. on taxable incomes over £36,700.

Mr. Maude *[pursuant to his reply, 1 May 1991]:* The answer should have read as follows:

The yield at 1991-92 levels of income of introducing the rates of income tax shown in the table is estimated to be about £1 billion in 1991-92, and about £2 billion in a full year.

Taxable income £	*Rate per cent.*
1 to 23,700	25
23,700 to 30,200	40
30,200 to 36,700	45
36,700 and over	50

Taxable income is income subject to tax from all sources after deducting allowances and reliefs. The estimate does not take account of the consequential effect on capital gains tax, nor does it allow for any behavioural effects that might result from such an increase.

Personal Allowances

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on tax revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of (i) a 5 per cent., (ii) a 10 per cent. and (iii) a 15 per cent. increase in the personal allowances and age-related personal allowances for income tax, not including the married couple's, widow's and additional personal allowances, assuming the benefit of the increase is limited to the basic rate of tax.

Mr. Maude: The information is given in the table, which assumes that the changes are restricted to the basic rate of income tax:

Increase[1] in personal allowances[2]	*Direct revenue effect (cost(−)/yield(+))*			
	Receipts in 1991-92		*In a full year at 1991-92 income levels*	
	Compared with 1990-91 allowances £ million	*Compared with statutory indexation £ million*	*Compared with 1990-91 allowances £ million*	*Compared with statutory indexation £ million*
(i) 5 per cent.	−0·9	+0·8	−1·1	+1·0
(ii) 10 per cent.	−1·7	−0·1	−2·2	−0·1
(iii) 15 per cent.	−2·5	−0·9	−3·2	−1·2

[1] Percentage increases are based on the 1990-91 levels of allowances.
[2] Excluding married couple's allowance for those aged under 65, additional personal allowance, and widows bereavement allowance.

Value Added Tax

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what items of safety equipment used to prevent accidents both at home and at work are exempt for VAT; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the items of safety equipment used in work places on which a refund of VAT can be claimed;

(3) if he has any proposals to introduce VAT exemptions on items of home safety equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The only items of safety equipment specifically zero rated for VAT are supplies of protective boots and helmets to industry for the purchaser's own personal use. VAT on other safety items supplied for use in respect of taxable business activities may be reclaimed in the normal way. It would be contrary to European Community law to extend our current VAT zero-rating provisions. Although member states may retain zero rates which were in force on 31 December 1975, they may neither widen the scope of existing provisions nor introduce new ones.

Volunteer Drivers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to ensure that no volunteer drivers will be made liable for tax on their mileage during the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: The position in law is that, if drivers for a voluntary car service receive mileage allowances which do no more than reimburse the expenses they have actually incurred, there will be no liability to income tax. But if they receive allowances which exceed their expenses, the profit may be taxable.

The great majority of drivers cover modest mileages each year and receive modest allowances providing no or minimal profit; and there is no question of taxing these. However, some volunteer drivers receive very significant amounts of allowances. With my approval, the Inland Revenue is considering whether any advice needs to be given to organisations involved with volunteer drivers. Until that review is completed, neither organisations using volunteer drivers nor the drivers themselves will be expected to take any action so far as income tax is concerned, in relation to mileage allowances for voluntary work. Drivers who are in business as taxi, hire car or minibus operators, and do some driving for voluntary car schemes, are regarded as driving in the course of their businesses and should therefore have included any allowances they receive in their business accounts.

I have noted the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about tax liabilities for the year 1991-92. Any new arrangements which may be introduced for what is expected to be the small proportion of drivers who may have a tax liability will be applied only from a current date; and there will be no question of reopening earlier years. I cannot yet say when the Inland Revenue's review will be completed.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Inland Revenue to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: Information relating to the financial years 1979-80 to 1987-88 inclusive is not readily available and cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost. The spend on management consultants—excluding computer-related consultancies—for the remaining years is as follows:

Year	*£K*
1988-89	1,253
1989-90	1,468
[1]1990-91	2,741
[2]1991-92	1,892

[1] Forecast outturn.
[2] Budget.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Inland Revenue; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The information is in the table.

Complements are not available for years before 1981.

At the senior level of the service, where management forms a major component of most jobs, there are servicewide common pay and grading arrangements. These unified grades 1 to 7 are known as the open structure and cover grades from permanent secretary level to grade 7 level. Within the unified grades there are no formal barriers to movement between the former occupational groups—for example, scientists, administrators, statisticians. Each post should be filled by the person best equipped in terms of skills, ability and experience.

Permanent staff in post: statistics division

1979-85

Grade	*1979* *SIP*	*1980* *SIP*	*1981* *Comp*[1]	*SIP*	*1982* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1983* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1984* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1985* *Comp*	*SIP*
Grade 3[2]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 5[2]	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Grade 6-7[2]	17·5	19·5	17	18·5	17	17	17	15	17	17	17	17
SEO	8	8	6	8	6	7	7	8	6	8	7	6
HEO	26	28·5	29	29·5	31	29	29	31	29	29	31	28·5
Senior assistant statistician	3	3	7	3	7	4	7	3	7	2	7	2
EO	54	59	62	54	60	49	49	47	42	46	39	36
Assistant statistician	2	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
AO	95	91	65	73	44	45	37	38	29	35	27	27
AA	43·5	42	29	37	19	21	17	18	13	12	13	11
Total	253	256	220	229	189	179	168	165	148	155	146	135·5

1986-91

Grade	*1986* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1987* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1988* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1989* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1990* *Comp*	*SIP*	*1991* *Comp*	*SIP*
Grade 3[2]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 5[2]	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Grade 6-7[2]	17	18	18	17	18	16	20	18	22	21	22	22
SEO	7	6	8	8	8	8	10	9	10	10	11·5	11
HEO	31	27	31	27	31	33	35	33	37	32	37	34
Senior assistant statistician	7	2	8	3	8	3	8	4	5	5	5	5
EO	39	46	42	48	42	50	42	39	46	51	45·5	51
Assistant statistician	0	5	0	3	0	2	0	2	3	2	3	2
AO	26	26	26	23	26	27	26	27	28	26	26·5	25
AA	14	13	14	13	14	14	14	13	14	13	14	11
Total	146	148	152	147	152	158	160	150	170	165	169·5	166

Customs and Excise

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees by HM Customs and Excise to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs and Excise estimates that expenditure on management and computer consultancies from 1979-80 to 1990-91 to be as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	Nil
1980-81	Nil
1981-82	Nil
1982-83	Nil
1983-84	0·02
1984-85	0·19
1985-86	1·34
1986-87	2·04
1987-88	1·44
1988-89	3·53
1989-90	3·25
1990-91	2·51

The budget for 1991-92 is £3·86 million.

Valuation Office

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will place a copy of the valuation office's rating circulars numbers 53 and 58 in the Library;

(2) if he will publish details of the valuation exercise carried out by the valuation office in preparation for publication of the Government's council tax proposals.

Mr. Maude: The Inland Revenue valuation office has been working with other Government Departments to provide policy advice to Ministers in connection with the Government's proposals for a new council tax in the usual way. It is not the practice to disclose the basis or the details of such advice.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of the exercises being undertaken by the valuation office in relation to rating circulars 53 and 58; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The estimated cost of these exercises is about £275,000.

Finance Bill

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the notes on those clauses of the Finance Bill to be taken in Committee of the whole House will be made available to hon. Members.

Mr. Mellor: Yes. The appropriate notes on clauses were placed in the Vote Office earlier today.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement about measures to combat tax avoidance.

Mr. Maples: The Government intend to bring forward measures in the current Finance Bill aimed at preventing the circumvention of the corporation tax ring fence around profits from North Sea oil, by schemes involving the use of stapled stock.

Section 497 of the Taxes Act 1988 prevents a company from setting off advance corporation tax on distributions made to an associated company against corporation tax on its ring fence profits—broadly the profits from exploring for and producing oil and gas in the United Kingdom and United Kingdom continental shelf. The Government propose to extend this provision to cover distributions made to any shareholder in respect of securities the ownership of which is linked in the form of stapled stock or otherwise to the ownership of shares in an associated company. The proposals will take effect for distributions made on or after today.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Central Office of Information.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* The number of staff employed in the press office of the Central Office of Information, which has always equalled the full complement, on 1 April since 1979-80 is as follows:

	Number
1979-80	2
1980-81	1
1981-82	1
1982-83	1
1983-84	1
1984-85	2
1985-86	1
1986-87	1
1987-88	1
1988-89	1
1989-90	1
1990-91	1
1991-92	1

Research Projects

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the research projects *(a)* currently under way and *(b)* planned by his Department, giving the title of the research and its completion date in each case.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Research commissioned by my Department and planned commissions are as follows:

Project title	*Estimated completion date*
In progress:	
Competitiveness of United Kingdom financial services	June 1991
Econometric modelling of labour and products market	September 1991
ESRC Macroeconomic Modelling Consortium (contribution)	Ongoing
Indirect taxation research	March 1992
IT for the disabled	December 1991
Valuation of overseas direct investment	August 1991
Vintage capital project	June 1991

Project title	Estimated completion date
Planned:	
Applicability to Government of new accounting techniques and concepts	March 1992
Career management	March 1992
Effects of the Social Charter	March 1992
Employee and potential employee opinion research	March 1992
Literature search on performance pay	March 1992

HMSO

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in HMSO; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* HMSO has had no separate statistical divisions or statistical posts from 1979 to the present date.

National Savings Department (Staff)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions for the Department for National Savings; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The numbers of staff employed in the statistical branch of the Department for National Savings in the years 1984-91 were as detailed in the table. Figures for the years 1981-83 are no longer available. There were no statistical posts before July 1981.

	Statistician (Grade 7)	*Senior assistant statistician*	*Assistant statistician*	*HEO*	*EO*	*AO*	*AA*
1 April 1984							
Complement	1	1	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Actual	1	—	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1 April 1985							
Complement	1	1	—	1	2	2	1
Actual	1	1	—	1	3	3	1
1 April 1986							
Complement	1	1	—	2	2	2	1
Actual	1	—	—	2	2	2	1
1 April 1987							
Complement	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Actual	1	—	1	2	2	2	1
1 April 1988							
Complement	1	—	1	1	2	2	1
Actual	1	—	1	1	2	2	1
1 April 1989							
Complement	1	—	1	1	1	2	1
Actual	1	—	1	1	1	2	1
1 April 1990							
Complement	1	—	1	1	1	2	1
Actual	—	—	1	1	1	2	1
1 April 1991							
Complement	1	—	1	1	1	2	1
Actual	1	—	1	1	1	2	1

n/a = not available.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing, for the most recent available date, the value in current prices of all tax reliefs and allowances claimed, on average, by taxpayers with gross incomes between *(a)* £0-£5,000, *(b)* £5,000-£10,000, *(c)* £10,000-£15,000, *(d)* £15,000-£20,000, *(e)* £20,000-£25,000, *(f)* £25,000-£30,000, *(g)* £30,000-£40,000, *(h)* £40,000-£50,000 and *(i)* over £50,000 a year.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* Latest estimates for taxpayers in 1990-91 are as follows:

Gross Income £ per year	*Amount of tax reliefs and allowances set against income £*
0-5,000	3,200
5,000-10,000	4,200
10,000-15,000	5,300
15,000-20,000	6,300
20,000-25,000	7,000
25,000-30,000	7,400
30,000-40,000	7,600
40,000-50,000	8,400
over 50,000	10,800
Average	5,200

Petrol Duties

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of a 1 per cent. increase or decrease in the duties on *(a)* leaded petrol, *(b)* unleaded petrol and *(c)* derv.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The revenue effects include the effect of consequential VAT on excise duty where appropriate. They are as follows:

£ million

	Revenue Gain/Loss	
	1991-92	*1992-93 (Full year)*
Leaded Petrol	45	45
Unleaded Petrol	30	40
Derv	20	25

There is not yet sufficient evidence on which to base reliable estimates of the amount of switching between leaded and unleaded petrol in response to a tax change. As a result, the figures above do not allow for any additional switching.

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast for the cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 and in a full year of the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The cost of income tax relief for BES in 1990-91 is provisionally estimated as £120 million. It is too early to make a reliable estimate for 1991-92.

TRANSPORT

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider whether earlier and systematic public information on whether a driver killed in a road crash had consumed alcohol would help to maintain awareness of the dangers of drink driving.

Mr. Chope: We publish aggregated figures based on coroners' data about drivers who were over the legal limit which show that the number of people killed in drink-related accidents has been reduced by 50 per cent. in the past 10 years. I do not believe it would assist in our continuing campaign against drinking and driving to publish details of whether or not an individual driver killed in a road crash had consumed alcohol.

Road Drainage

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an estimate of the increased length of repair-free life of a motorway built using modern drainage techniques as opposed to those constructed using traditional techniques.

Mr. Chope: There is no firm evidence to suggest that modern drainage systems are more effective than properly constructed traditional systems. The main objectives of incorporating modern drainage systems are to separate surface water and sub-surface drainage, improve value for money, reduce the demand for scarce aggregate resources and reduce stone scatter.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate the reasons for the reluctance of building contractors to fit modern drainage systems in new road building programmes.

Mr. Chope: I am not aware of any reluctance on the part of contractors to fit modern drainage systems, but am willing to look at any examples which the hon. Member can provide.

Cars (Anti-Theft Measures)

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he will next meet representatives of the motor manufacturing industry to discuss the raising of standards of car design to combat theft of and from cars;

(2) when he will next meet representatives of the AA, RAC and National Breakdown to discuss ways in which automobiles can be better designed to combat theft of and from cars.

Mr. Chope: The Government attach a high priority to the need to improve the design of cars to prevent the theft both of cars themselves and of objects from them.

For this reason, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has recently met representatives from vehicle manufacturers and the insurance industry. My Department was represented at both these meetings. Further meetings with interested parties will be arranged in future.

Urban Motorways

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total mileage of urban motorway in each urban area of England *(a)* already constructed and in operation, *(b)* under construction at present and *(c)* planned for the future.

Mr. Chope: Information is not held in this form, but there are 350 miles of motorways in the London boroughs and English metropolitan districts.

Airport Security

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has discussed with British Airways, BAA or the Metropolitan police the allegations made by Mrs. Victoria Tregartha about inadequate security cover at Heathrow.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport has discussed Mrs. Tregartha's allegations with British Airways who had no evidence that the firm, which was the subject of Mrs. Tregartha's allegations, was not carrying out its duties satisfactorily. The Department has also been in contact with the Metropolitan police who are still investigating these allegations. There have been no discussions about the allegations with BAA.

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will reconsider his response to the recommendation of the House of Commons Select

Committee on Transport for an independent airport security inspectorate with a separate aviation security fund and levy.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to change the present arrangements whereby, within the Department of Transport, the Aviation Security Inspectorate is independent of the aviation policy divisions. That arrangement is in line with the Select Committee's recommendation. The Government's reasons for rejecting the Select Committee's recommendation that an aviation security fund should be established and paid for by a levy on passengers remain valid. The fund which was abolished in 1983 was bureaucratic, complicated and costly to administer.

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department has taken arising out of the allegations of Mrs. Victoria Tregartha about inadequate security cover by the BA Securiplans company at Heathrow; when the Department was first aware of the allegations; whether it has yet interviewed Mrs. Tregartha; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department first became aware of the allegations made by Mrs. Tregartha when the article appeared in the *Observer* on 7 April. Arrangements were then immediately made for one of the Department's aviation security inspectors to inspect Securiplan's operations at Heathrow. There was no evidence during the period of the inspection that departmental requirements were not being met.

The Department has not interviewed Mrs. Tregartha because the Metropolitan police are still investigating the allegations in the article. If it turns out that they are true, the Department will take whatever further action is necessary.

The Department requires airports and airlines to meet the requirements of the national aviation security programme. If airports and airlines use private security firms, they must ensure that the standards required by the programme are met.

DVLA Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will quantify the number of disclosures of personal data that have taken place in the last year from driver and vehicle licensing agency records to those people who show reasonable cause as outlined in section 15(1) of the Road Vehicle (Registration and Licencing) Regulations 1971; whether he will describe the procedures that he adopts to satisfy himself of the reasonableness of that cause; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: During the 12 months ended March 1991 the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has answered 303,618 reasonable cause inquiries about names and addresses of current or past vehicle keepers recorded at DVLA.

"Reasonable cause" is not defined in law. For the purposes of the 1971 regulations the DVLA generally interprets this to mean an inquiry about a vehicle which has been involved in an incident such as an accident or an offence under the road traffic law and the information is essential to resolving the matter. Requests are carefully vetted to ensure a balance is maintained between releasing information where it is justified and protecting the privacy of individual motorists as required under the principles of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is taken to ensure that *(a)* new taxi driver licence applicants and *(b)* current taxi driver licence holders have declared any past criminal offences.

Mr. McLoughlin: Outside London, section 59 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 requires district councils, which license taxi drivers, to satisfy themselves that an applicant is a fit and proper person to hold a licence. The majority of councils will require both new applicants and those seeking to renew their licences to declare any past criminal offences, and local authorities sometimes request police corroboration of such declarations. However, information from police records is not generally made available for these purposes.

Departmental Land, London

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much land his Department owns in London; and how much of that land is unused.

Mr. Chope: The Department of Transport owns 220 miles of trunk road in the London area. In addition it has acquired 1,203 dwellings, 103 business premises and approximately 15·5 acres of land in connection with trunk road improvement schemes in the area.

At present 142 of these dwellings are vacant; 66 are now surplus and are to be sold, 61 are due to be demolished soon and 15 are in the process of being let.

Twenty of the business premises are vacant and tenants are being sought.

Of the land acquired for road schemes, 11·5 acres are undeveloped; 2·2 acres have been let and 1·8 acres are now surplus to requirements and are to be sold.

DVLC, Swansea

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he is taking to provide compensation to those driving schools whose business has been adversely affected by the failure of the DVLC, Swansea, to process heavy goods vehicle provisional licence applications within one week;

(2) how much money will be saved now that the work of the area licensing offices has been transferred to the DVLC, Swansea;

(3) what steps he is taking to reinforce the heavy goods vehicle provisional licence department at DVLC, Swansea, now that it is handling all the provisional licence applications previously dealt with by the area offices;

(4) what steps he is taking to ensure that the DVLC, Swansea, provides an equivalent or better service than that previously provided by the area licensing offices; and if he will indicate the number of days it will now take to process a provisional heavy goods vehicle licence application;

(5) how many additional staff were employed at DVLC, Swansea, to cope with the increased work load once the 11 area licensing offices stopped handling heavy goods vehicle provisional licence applications.

Mr. Chope: DVLA assumed full responsibility for the licensing of lorry and bus drivers from 1 April. Around 40

staff have been trained to deal with applications from lorry and bus drivers, with a further 20 staff in those areas dealing with medical cases and inquiries.

Because DVLA inherited some 5,000 uncompleted cases from the traffic area offices, 16 additional staff have been temporarily drafted in from other parts of DVLA to help out, and some overtime is being worked. The inquiry unit's opening hours have also been extended.

The new lorry and bus driver licensing system at DVLA should be more efficient and quicker. The new system is expected to cost around £1 million a year less to run. DVLA is already dealing with most applications in eight to nine working days, which compares well with the target of 10 working days set for the traffic area offices.

I regret that some cases, which were caught up in the transfer of work from the traffic area offices to DVLA, have taken longer. There is no provision for compensation, but when a driver or driving school has asked for a licence urgently, action has been taken whenever possible to resolve any problem and to arrange for the speedy issue of the licence. Provisional vocational driving licences are given the highest priority at DVLA.

Airports (Flying Hours)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the airports in England which have restrictions on flying hours together with the hours during which landing and take-off is permissible.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department does not have information on flying hour restrictions at all airports in England. Information about the hours during which United Kingdom airports are open is given in such publications as "Pooley's Flight Guide", which is produced annually with the assistance of the Civil Aviation Authority.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Unfit Meat

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library, for each of the last five years, the number of bovine animals that his veterinary officers have found to contain prohibited artificial substances rendering the meat unfit for human consumption; what is the nature of the substances; and what is the number of prosecutions which followed.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. The information is being placed in the Library of the House.

Rodenticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *271*, if he will list those seven products approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations as rodenticides.

Mr. Maclean: The seven products approved for use by professionals as rodenticides are:

Alphachloralose (pure)
Alphachloralose 4 per cent. ready mixed
Klearwell Alphacloralose Bait
Rentokil Alphachloralose Concentrate
Rentokil Alphalard
Rodextron Mouse Bait
Townex Mouse Poison

There is a further approved rodenticide containing alphacloralose, Rentokil Alphakil, available for use by non-professional users.

Veterinary Investigation Centre

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what level of financial support has been granted to each veterinary investigation centre in England in each year from 1979 onwards; and whether he has any plans to increase the level of financial assistance.

Mr. Curry: It is not possible to supply this information at the level requested. The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Emergency Food Stocks

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether all the foodstuffs held in his Ministry's emergency food stocks are fit for human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 January 1991, at column 545. Food stocks no longer fit for human consumption are removed from the strategic food stockpile.

Hague Preference

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet a deputation from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to discuss the Hague preference.

Mr. Curry: We have already had a number of exchanges on this issue with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. We are quite willing to include the items in the agenda in future meetings with the NFFO.

Livestock

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals for the improvement of the quality of British livestock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The primary impetus for the improvement of the quality of British livestock must come from the marketplace where quality products will receive a premium return if they are marketed effectively.

The Government encourage quality production directly by aiding specialist beef production through the suckler cow premium scheme currently worth over £71 million per year to the industry. In addition, the Government fund a programme of research and development projects costing over £1 million per year to improve techniques for the selection of breeding stock and for the transmission of desirable genetic characteristics from one generation to the next.

Fish Imports

Mr. Battle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which countries have exported fish to the United Kingdom since 1974; and how much these exports are as a proportion of all United Kingdom fish imports.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* The table shows, for the years 1985 to 1990, the main countries exporting fish and products to the United Kingdom, the quantities involved in tonnes, and the percentage shares. Countries exporting less than 10,000 tonnes in each of the years are not listed, though those appearing accounted for some 80 per cent. of the total trade in the years shown. Comparable data for the years before 1985 are not readily available.

United Kingdom imports of fish and fish products (tonnes)

	1985		1986		1987		1988		1989		1990	
	Number	Per cent. of total	Number	Per cent. of total	Number	Per cent. of total	Number	Per cent. of total	Number	Per cent. of total	Number	Per cent. of total
Total trade of which:	384,925	100	415,448	100	419,490	100	440,805	100	482,623	100	497,353	100
Netherlands	26,572	6·90	21,889	5·27	17,548	4·18	17,388	3·94	20,155	4·18	18,283	3·68
FR of Germany	9,148	2·38	6,776	1·63	7,118	1·70	7,042	1·60	12,899	2·67	10,952	2·20
Irish Republic	32,050	8·33	30,482	7·34	42,907	10·23	39,105	8·87	25,049	5·19	27,289	5·49
Denmark	55,366	14·38	53,923	12·98	50,412	12·02	54,530	12·37	62,491	12·95	53,052	10·67
Portugal	5,911	1·54	5,339	1·29	3,849	0·92	5,484	1·24	16,952	3·51	16,078	3·23
Iceland	73,885	19·19	93,584	22·53	94,608	22·55	101,504	23·03	98,028	20·31	115,022	23·13
Faroe Islands	10,792	2·80	9,543	2·30	7,623	1·82	9,652	2·19	11,587	2·40	14,047	2·82
Norway	46,960	12·20	43,349	10·43	41,831	9·97	43,488	9·87	42,391	8·78	34,818	7·00
Thailand	8,521	2·21	24,394	5·87	28,004	6·68	36,327	8·24	45,831	9·50	37,442	7·53
Japan	11,143	2·89	6,960	1·68	4,247	1·01	2,199	0·50	4,770	0·99	3,657	0·74
Canada	19,814	5·15	22,234	5·35	22,821	5·44	16,883	3·83	18,555	3·84	26,919	5·41
USA	17,049	4·43	20,038	4·82	16,255	3·87	16,947	3·84	15,467	3·20	23,986	4·82

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Education Authority (Finances)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the capital bid for 1990-91 and *(b)* the capital allocation for 1990-91 for each local education authority in England.

Mr. Fallon: Details of local authority plans and education annual capital guidelines for 1990-91 are set out below, together with bids and allocations for voluntary aided and special agreement schools.

Education annual capital guidelines and LEA plans for 1990-91

LEA	Total plans £000s 1990-91	Total ACG £000s 1990-91
Barking	1,415	485
Barnet	4,484	888
Bexley	4,892	1,242
Brent	6,332	687
Bromley	6,612	1,684
Croydon	19,319	1,061
Ealing	14,683	889
Enfield	30,222	1,315
Haringey	5,245	1,132
Harrow	3,345	1,073
Havering	8,589	5,881
Hillingdon	7,692	1,140
Hounslow	7,000	539
Kingston	4,475	268
Merton	11,257	3,608
Newham	16,733	6,461
Redbridge	5,787	1,577
Richmond	7,290	1,490
Sutton	14,161	2,974
Waltham	11,771	6,661
City	0	0
Camden	5,369	1,421
Westminster	5,613	465
Greenwich	10,823	3,849
Hackney	9,218	2,690
Hammersmith	3,662	1,047
Islington	8,670	1,079
Kensington	9,172	2,145
Lambeth	4,858	1,480
Lewisham	8,762	1,382
Southwark	17,740	5,429
Wandsworth	17,305	1,677
Tower Hamlets	33,246	17,629
Birmingham	15,407	10,494
Coventry	12,758	2,429
Dudley	6,308	5,083
Sandwell	8,493	1,647
Solihull	6,365	1,561
Walsall	4,911	1,369
Wolverhampton	3,353	936
Knowsley	6,594	2,080
Liverpool	16,861	9,742
St. Helens	6,610	5,066
Sefton	7,111	4,176
Wirral	7,099	3,354
Bolton	5,619	802
Bury	1,476	815
Manchester	29,168	4,397
Oldham	7,707	5,942
Rochdale	12,529	4,278
Salford	6,461	3,961
Stockport	3,385	1,500
Tameside	2,438	1,470
Trafford	11,268	9,448
Wigan	7,748	4,378
Barnsley	2,276	1,933
Doncaster	1,269	860
Rotherham	3,712	1,589
Sheffield	6,068	2,828
Bradford	28,814	9,731
Calderdale	2,845	1,514
Kirklees	6,876	1,216
Leeds	15,768	3,546
Wakefield	6,860	5,394
Gateshead	8,776	1,345
Newcastle	8,438	1,564
North Tyneside	5,138	1,895
South Tyneside	10,019	1,894

LEA	Total plans £000s 1990-91	Total ACG £000s 1990-91
Sunderland	10,205	3,183
Isle's of Scilly	300	221
Avon	20,049	5,653
Bedfordshire	12,767	2,409
Berkshire	15,932	4,500
Buckinghamshire	14,902	6,444
Cambridge	34,854	13,229
Cheshire	15,935	5,814
Cleveland	7,761	4,929
Cornwall	18,786	6,522
Cumbria	13,051	7,930
Derbyshire	26,701	14,743
Devon	28,679	12,984
Dorset	11,414	3,853
Durham	19,564	4,924
East Sussex	23,967	8,773
Essex	42,364	14,063
Gloucester	18,734	7,917
Hampshire	37,095	13,325
Hereford and Worcester	12,740	6,248
Hertford	16,526	6,526
Humberside	17,795	9,004
Isle of Wight	6,275	1,912
Kent	33,849	16,370
Lancashire	36,022	18,524
Leicester	16,794	11,154
Lincoln	23,274	7,387
Norfolk	10,044	3,040
North Yorkshire	7,735	4,105
Northampton	10,076	6,182
Northumberland	5,601	2,382
Nottinghamshire	12,952	3,716
Oxfordshire	15,443	3,751
Shropshire	10,272	6,319
Somerset	13,498	5,563
Staffordshire	16,421	6,375
Suffolk	15,754	7,921
Surrey	11,805	4,128
Warwick	6,355	1,507
West Sussex	12,754	3,633
Wiltshire	19,214	6,256

Notes

[1] All figures are in £000s in cash terms.

[2] All figures include initial allocations and Supplementary Credit Approvals (SCA) issued in the course of the year.

Bids and allocations for capital expenditure by governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools for 1990-91

LEA	Submitted bids £000s	Allocations £000s
Barking	1,940	1,940
Barnet	1,504	912
Bexley	1,868	437
Brent	883	394
Bromley	200	80
Croydon	1,101	1,066
Ealing	257	93
Enfield	846	344
Haringey	2,790	2,336
Harrow	208	0
Havering	357	357
Hillingdon	1,063	232
Hounslow	327	0
Kingston	390	26
Merton	674	449
Newham	305	0
Redbridge	401	314
Richmond	1,403	505
Sutton	842	612
Waltham	100	0
City	0	0
Camden	1,706	1,097
Westminister	311	110
Greenwich	324	0
Hackney	432	24
Hammersmith	661	452
Islington	123	38
Kensington	5,462	4,775
Lambeth	946	411
Lewisham	412	52
Southwark	1,814	1,186
Wandsworth	131	26
Tower Hamlets	702	632
Birmingham	1,527	1,172
Coventry	1,206	453
Dudley	1,005	632
Sandwell	752	176
Solihull	1,441	1,191
Walsall	193	50
Wolverhampton	20	0
Knowsley	724	169
Liverpool	5,897	4,487
St. Helens	638	128
Sefton	2,272	1,527
Wirral	352	304
Bolton	965	137
Bury	1,008	641
Manchester	1,434	744
Oldham	957	184
Rochdale	1,492	669
Salford	540	327
Stockport	573	472
Tameside	103	20
Trafford	551	292
Wigan	1,605	699
Barnsley	0	0
Doncaster	345	215
Rotherham	170	0
Sheffield	678	120
Bradford	1,374	1,150
Calderdale	426	204
Kirklees	313	144
Leeds	9,379	7,107
Wakefield	451	145
Gateshead	203	57
Newcastle	941	597
North Tyneside	1,017	835
South Tyneside	145	51
Sunderland	230	6
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Avon	3,174	2,311
Bedfordshire	175	15
Berkshire	1,134	438
Bucks	2,661	763
Cambridge	1,450	58
Cheshire	3,454	1,736
Cleveland	723	0
Cornwall	1,487	1,201
Cumbria	1,313	654
Derbyshire	1,847	1,132
Devon	1,019	465
Dorset	6,795	4,847
Durham	760	277
East Sussex	2,492	1,725
Essex	653	529
Gloucester	3,610	923
Hampshire	4,115	3,664
Hereford and Worcester	1,771	1,081
Hertford	970	202
Humberside	927	508
Isle of Wight	87	87
Kent	3,351	2,756
Lancashire	11,748	4,970
Leicester	833	459
Lincoln	911	125
Norfolk	1,074	184
North Yorkshire	913	69
Northampton	309	0
Northumberland	556	194
Notts	2,186	1,036

LEA	Submitted bids £000s	Allocations £000s
Oxfordshire	2,911	1,920
Shropshire	496	120
Somerset	1,749	1,562
Staffs	1,499	1,068
Suffolk	425	256
Surrey	2,021	819
Warwick	2,043	1,097
West Sussex	3,239	2,527
Wiltshire	1,026	767

Notes:
1. All figures are in £000s in cash terms.
2. Allocations allow governors to complete work up to the limit set.
3. The Secretary of State pays grant aid at the rate of 85 per cent.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the revenue budget for 1990-91 and *(b)* the standard spending assessment for 1990-91 for each local education authority in England.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is given in the table below, together with the amounts of inner London education grants for the relevant authorities.

Local education authority	(a) Budgeted expenditure on education £m	(b) Education standard spending assessment £m	(c) Inner London education grant[1] £m
City of London	3·419	0·824	0·210
Camden	58·548	52·762	6·781
Greenwich	100·792	82·257	11·345
Hackney	100·189	91·828	6·523
Hammersmith and Fulham	56·10	45·602	6·812
Islington	77·262	64·211	7·841
Kensington and Chelsea	40·437	29·783	3·694
Lambeth	n.a.	105·484	9·475
Lewisham	97·766	86·010	10·565
Southwark	94·457	85·168	9·480
Tower Hamlets	102·740	91·292	9·102
Wandsworth	111·839	84·149	10·974
Westminster	75·208	44·456	7·198
Barking and Dagenham	55·159	48·338	—
Barnet	87·401	88·054	—
Bexley	68·961	67·800	—
Brent	94·655	108·138	—
Bromley	80·827	79·378	—
Croydon	110·736	102·781	—
Ealing	103·709	100·586	—
Enfield	92·865	88·524	—
Haringey	n.a.	79·308	—
Harrow	66·381	65·387	—
Havering	78·109	71·015	—
Hillingdom	76·904	69·110	—
Hounslow	75·420	68·774	—
Kingston-upon-Thames	42·769	36·275	—
Merton	51·652	47·164	—
Newham	94·770	98·510	—
Redbridge	67·729	71·225	—
Richmond-upon-Thames	42·581	35·997	—
Sutton	54·087	47·633	—
Waltham Forest	85·671	81·744	—
Bolton	88,646	87·298	—
Bury	59·888	51·895	—
Manchester	168·338	163·642	—
Oldham	78·665	76·526	—
Rochdale	74·362	71·852	—
Salford	78·842	71·245	—
Stockport	89·917	81·829	—
Tameside	70·678	69·741	—
Trafford	65·837	64·046	—
Wigan	108·976	95·977	—
Knowsley	64·282	64·361	—
Liverpool	178·294	177·391	—
St. Helens	67·267	60·740	—
Sefton	92·415	87·681	—
Wirral	110·738	112·387	—
Barnsley	66·229	66·121	—
Doncaster	103·921	96·030	—
Rotherham	90·187	82·575	—
Sheffield	169·837	148·560	—
Gateshead	68·542	58·160	—
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	93·963	82·930	—
North Tyneside	64·480	58·226	—
South Tyneside	55·710	49·543	—
Sunderland	99·941	98·289	—

Local education authority	(a) Budgeted expenditure on education £m	(b) Education standard spending assessment £m	(c) Inner London education grant[1] £m
Birmingham	352·808	399·449	—
Coventry	111·908	102·007	—
Dudley	94·456	89·474	—
Sandwell	118·953	104·460	—
Solihull	63·314	60·504	—
Walsall	98·685	90·329	—
Wolverhampton	94·992	94·320	—
Bradford	174·669	179·653	—
Calderdale	66·947	63·530	—
Kirklees	137·344	128·823	—
Leeds	231·235	211·450	—
Wakefield	102·228	91·139	—
Avon	303·570	254·787	—
Bedfordshire	184·802	175·531	—
Berkshire	225·469	229·252	—
Buckinghamshire	214·468	206·348	—
Cambridgeshire	202·693	193·391	—
Cheshire	318·739	294·559	—
Cleveland	214·430	202·966	—
Cornwall	138·336	140·824	—
Cumbria	159·102	142·882	—
Derbyshire	326·789	271·798	—
Devon	290·463	276·355	—
Dorset	169·468	157·560	—
Durham	199·467	183·819	—
East Sussex	176·212	168·819	—
Essex	472·463	458·657	—
Gloucestershire	163·654	148·565	—
Hampshire	461·580	453·266	—
Hereford and Worcester	197·342	196·842	—
Hertfordshire	320·460	293·468	—
Humberside	296·792	277·145	—
Isle of Wight	38·047	36·532	—
Kent	434·043	456·635	—
Lancashire	467·334	445·622	—
Leicestershire	305·248	276·819	—
Lincolnshire	177·303	179·312	—
Norfolk	212·391	209·872	—
Northamptonshire	190·199	179·549	—
Northumberland	100·350	89·824	—
North Yorkshire	211·188	196·440	—
Nottinghamshire	338·799	311·592	—
Oxfordshire	169·252	151·459	—
Shropshire	138·087	128·216	—
Somerset	146·238	128·613	—
Staffordshire	321·768	302·935	—
Suffolk	188·230	172·628	—
Surrey	266·984	257·425	—
Warwickshire	151·144	142·196	—
West Sussex	181·805	183·940	—
Wiltshire	174·677	163·364	—
Isles of Scilly	1·126	0·946	—

[1] Inner London education grants are paid to provide, through the support of expenditure on education, transitional help to charge-payers in Inner London boroughs and in the City of London where the authorities inherited responsibility for the education service from the Inner London Education Authority.—

Note:—

Information on budgeted expenditure is taken from local authorities' returns to the Department of the Environment on forms RA90/91 and RA(SG)90/91. Figures have been repriced to out-turn.—

Research Councils (Expenditure)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money, and what percentage of total resources, was spent in the last year for which figures are available by each of the research councils on *(a)* research into management development, *(b)* management training and *(c)* training overall, excluding the employment costs of the trainees; and how the training expenditure is divided between courses provided internally and those provided externally.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The details are as follows:

(a) Research into management development

In 1990-91 the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) made 15 awards totalling £419,000 for research projects into various aspects of management development. This represented 5 per cent. of the total of research grants made in that year.

(b) Management training

In 1990-91, the ESRC was supporting 359 students on courses relating to management training at a cost of £1,443,000. This represented some 15 per cent. of the total ESRC expenditure on postgraduate awards.

Expenditure by the research councils on management training of their own staff was as follows:

Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC)

In 1990-91 the AFRC spent £70,313 on management training, £60,000 internally and £10,313 on external management courses.

Economic and Social Research Council

In 1990-91 the ESRC spent some £7,000 on management training, of which £700 was spent externally.

Medical Research Council (MRC)

This information (and also at *(c)* below) is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)

In 1990-91 NERC spent £260,000 on management training, of which £140,000 was spent internally.

Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC)

For the period 1 August 1989 to 31 July 1990, SERC spent £193,000 on management training, all of which was undertaken by the research council's joint training service (JTS).

(c) Training overall

AFRC's total expenditure on staff training in 1990-91 was £270,133, of which £150,000 was undertaken internally or through the JTS. The total of science budget resources devoted to training was about 0·3 per cent.

ESRC's total expenditure on staff training in 1990-91 was £32,100 of which £23,000 was undertaken by JTS. This total represents about 0·1 per cent. of the council's resources from the science budget.

NERC's total expenditure on staff training in 1990-91 was £650,000, of which £220,000 was undertaken internally or by JTS. Total expenditure represented 0·37 per cent. of the council's resources from the science budget.

In the period 1 August 1989 to 31 July 1990, SERC estimates that its total expenditure on staff training amounted to about £707,000. Of this some £420,000 was estimated to have been spent internally. The total training expenditure represents some 0·17 per cent. of the science budget resources made available to SERC.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the cost so far of ballots of parents held under section 61 of the Education Act.

Mr. Eggar: The Electoral Reform Society conducts all parental ballots for grant-maintained status and claims its costs for each individual ballot from the Department of Education and Science. The total of these costs currently stands at some £175,000.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for each of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91, what have been the total levels of (i) liability for VAT, (ii) relief from liability for rates and (iii) special purpose grant (VAT) for grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: Details of grant-maintained schools' actual liability for VAT are not available. The total level of newly acquired rates relief for ex-county schools was some £141,000 in 1989-90 and some £1,103,000 in 1990-91. Total special purpose grant (VAT) paid to grant-maintained schools was £231,000 in 1989-90 and £639,000 in 1990-91.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which grant-maintained schools have been visited by Her Majesty's inspectors, and in each case (i) by how many inspectors, (ii) for how long, (iii) at what cost and (iv) whether a report will be published.

Mr. Eggar: At the end of March 1991, there were 50 schools operating under grant-maintained status and HMI had visited 46 of them. Listed below are details of the visits made to each school.

HMI visits to grant-maintained schools made between September 1989 and March 1991

Visit	*Number of visits*	*Total number of HMI involved in visits*	*Length of each visit (days)*	*Cost (£)*
Hendon	2	4	1	960
Queen Elizabeth's Barnet	2	5	1	1,200
Queensbury	3	8	1, 4	5,040
Baverstock	3	9	1, 2, 4	6,480
Small Heath	3	8	1	1,440
St. James	6	6	1	1,440
Colyton Grammar	3	3	1	720
Old Swinford Hospital	3	4	1	960
London Oratory	4	4	1	960
Wilmington GS for Girls	3	4	1	960
Castle Hall	3	3	1	960
Heckmondwike GS	4	6	0·5, 1, 1, 2	2,280
Bacup and Rawtenstall	2	4	1	960
King's, Grantham	3	5	1	1,200
Queen Elizabeth's GS	3	4	1	960
Skegness GS	2	3	1	960
Wilson's	2	2	0·5, 1	600
Audenshaw	3	3	1	720
Bankfield	2	7	1, 4	5,280
St. Francis Xavier	2	3	1	720
Beechen Cliff	1	1	1	240
Southlands	1	1	1	240
Claremont	2	2	1, 2	720
Netherthorpe	1	2	0·5	240
Ribston Hall	1	1	1	240
London Nautical	1	3	2	1,440
Cardinal Vaughan	2	5	1	1,200
Lancaster RGS	1	1	1	240
Southfield	2	3	1	720
Bridgewater Hall	1	1	1	240

Visit	Number of visits	Total number of HMI involved in visits	Length of each visit (days)	Cost (£)
Brindley Hall	1	1	1	240
Ecclesbourne	1	2	1	480
Bournemouth GS	2	3	1	720
Stroud High	1	1	1	240
Marling	1	1	1	240
Pate's GS	1	2	1	480
Rickmansworth	1	2	1	480
Bishopshalt	1	1	1	240
Long Field High	2	2	1, 2	720
Carre's GS	1	3	1	720
Adams GS	1	1	1	240
Guildford	1	1	1	240
Wolverhampton High	1	1	2	480
Handsworth GS	1	1	1	240
Buller's Wood	1	1	1	240
Francis Bacon	1	2	1	480

In all cases the inspectors' findings were reported orally to the head and to the chairman of governors where he or she was able to attend. None of these inspections was planned to lead to a published report. My right hon. and learned Friend will therefore not be publishing the findings of these individual school inspectors.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what would be the total full-year cost of grant payable to schools as (i) transitional grant, (ii) special purpose grant (development) and (iii) capital grant if all eligible schools became grant-maintained at the current levels of each *(a)* during 1991-92 and *(b)* over a five-year period.

Mr. Eggar: Given the statutory timetable it is not possible for all schools to become grant-maintained in the financial year 1991-92.

These levels of payment are reviewed annually in the light of the Government's spending priorities for education and other services. It is therefore not possible to project a figure for the total cost if all schools became grant-maintained over a five-year period.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many copies have been distributed and, in each case, at what cost of all the editions of the booklet (i) "School Governors—How to Become a Grant-Maintained School", (ii) "Grant-Maintained Schools—Questions Parents Ask" and (iii) "Grant-Maintained Schools—What it Means For Staff".

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is given in the table:

Publication	Total printing cost (all editions) £000	Number of copies distributed (all editions)[1]	Postage costs £000
School Governors: How to become a grant-maintained school	46·9	80,000	[2]n/a
Grant-maintained schools: Questions parents ask	51·6	140,000	[3]n/a
Grant-maintained schools: What it means for staff	9·8	100,000	14·0

[1] The recorded figures are for initial block distributions. Figures for further distributions to individual schools following ad hoc requests are not available.

[2] Postage costs for the block distribution of the first edition were not recorded separately. It cost £870 to post an initial block distribution of the second edition. The third edition has not been block distributed as yet.

[3] It cost £3,700 to post an initial block distribution of the first edition. It cost £8,400 to post a further block distribution of that edition for primary schools with less than 300 pupils when they became eligible for grant-maintained status. Included in that distribution were copies of the second edition of "School Governors: How to Become a Grant-Maintained School".

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for each of the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92, what have been the average total allocations of capital grant to grant-maintained schools *(i)* per school and *(ii)* per pupil.

Mr. Eggar: Total grant for capital expenditure by grant-maintained schools in 1990-91 was £6·5 million. The planned grant expenditure for 1991-92 is £10·5 million. The average per school for 1990-91 was £130,186 and per pupil £181 based on total school and pupil numbers in that year. Figures for 1991-92 will depend upon the total number of schools and pupils in the sector this year.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for each of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91, what was *(i)* the amount available and *(ii)* the amount paid to grant-maintained schools as special purpose grant (development).

Mr. Eggar: Special purpose grant (development) of £177,573 was available to grant-maintained schools in 1989-90. The amount actually paid in that year was £171,190. In 1990-91, special purpose grant (development) of £705,126 was available. This amount will be adjusted during the course of the current financial year if financial returns from schools show that the full amount of grant was not required for the purposes for which it has been made available.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what payments have been made from public funds to the Grant-Maintained Schools Trust in each year since its creation.

Mr. Eggar: Payments of central Government grant in each financial year have been as follows:

	£
1988-89	25,000
1989-90	250,000
1990-91	448,000

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for each of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91, what has been *(a)* the total and *(b)* the average per pupil of (i) annual maintenance grant and (ii) all other grant aid paid to grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: Total annual maintenance grant—AMG—paid was £14·9 million in 1989-90 and £59·2 million in 1990-91. A simple average per pupil can be derived by dividing these figures by pupil numbers recorded in the previous January by all schools that were grant-maintained in that year. On this basis, average AMG paid per pupil was £1,083 in 1989-90 and £1,645 in 1990-91. These figures take no account of the fact that some schools were incorporated as grant-maintained at different times during the year in question.

The total of other grants paid was £2,466,000 in 1989-90 and £8,128,000 in 1990-91. These figures exclude transitional grant which in these years was paid to schools before incorporation as GM schools. It makes little sense to relate the totals of other grants to pupil numbers since these grants are paid on a number of different bases. However, these totals divided by the same pupil numbers produce per pupil figures of £179 in 1989-90 and £226 in 1990-91.

Schools Branch 4

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many staff are employed in schools branch 4, division B at his Department; and what is the annual cost of running this Department.

Mr. Eggar: There are 26 staff employed in schools 4 division B. The cost of running this division in the 1990-91 financial year was approximately £368,000.

Teachers (Assessment)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to accredit prior learning among staff currently employed as teachers; and if he will ensure that teachers who have not had their skills assessed will not be made redundant on grounds of lack of qualification until an assessment has been made.

Mr. Fallon: It is for the LEA or, in a school with a delegated budget, the governing body to determine whether any teacher should be dismissed. If it behaves unreasonably, a dismissal may be found unfair by an industrial tribunal. LEAs and schools are responsible for deciding what induction and other training should be provided for the individual teachers whom they employ. They also share responsibility with other bodies that provide or accredit training for deciding on the scope for accrediting teachers' prior learning.

Children (Assessment)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science of those children subject to assessment at seven years as part of the national curriculum *(a)* how many are in mixed age classes and *(b)* how many are in classes of over 30 in size.

Mr. Eggar: Information on the number of seven-year-old children in mixed age classes and in classes of over 30 in size is not collected regularly. In January 1990, 24 per cent. of all pupils in maintained primary schools in England were in classes of over 30 taught by one teacher.

Further Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his statement on the future of further education 21 March, *Official Report*, columns 432-448, whether local authorities will be required to seek his consent for contracts exposed to competitive tendering arrangements under the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Eggar: No. The application of compulsory competitive tendering to contracts affecting further education and sixth form colleges remains that described in DES circulars 7/88 and 9/88, copies of which are in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Whaling

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister what action the British Government intend to take at the International Whaling Commission this year to ensure that the moratorium on commercial whaling is maintained.

The Prime Minister: We shall continue to support the moratorium on commercial whaling.

Promis Software

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Departments have purchased Promis software.

The Prime Minister: Departments have delegated authority from the Treasury to purchase proprietary software packages to meet their own needs. Information on such procurements is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 2 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

International Arms Register

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had regarding the establishment of an international arms register.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 April to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) at column *32*.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage of all magistrates are women; what percentage of magistrates appointed in each of the past 10 years have been women; what percentage of women magistrates are under the age of 40 years; what is the average age of magistrates; what is the average age of all women magistrates; and if he has any proposals to appoint more *(a)* women magistrates and *(b)* women magistrates under 40 years.

The Solicitor-General: As at January 1991, in the Lord Chancellor's area of responsibility, women represented 45 per cent. of the total number of active lay magistrates. The percentage of women magistrates appointed in each of the past 10 years, rounded to the nearest point was as follows:

	Per cent.
1981	42
1982	43
1983	45
1984	48
1985	44
1986	46
1987	51
1988	48
1989	49
1990	51

Approximately 4 per cent. of women magistrates are under the age of 40.

The average age of magistrates and the average age of all women magistrates, could only be ascertained at disproportionate cost.

The answer to whether there are any proposals to appoint more *(a)* women magistrates and *(b)* women magistrates under 40 years is yes.

Legal Profession (Remuneration)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Attorney-General if the review by the Lord Chancellor of the legal aid system in the United Kingdom will consider means to harmonise levels of remuneration payable to the legal profession, and to remove existing anomalies between rates of remuneration paid to legal advisers, north and south of the Scottish border.

The Attorney-General: The current review is addressing the financial conditions for the grant of legal aid. It is not considering the levels of remuneration payable to the legal profession.

Legal Aid

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Attorney-General what is the policy of the Government towards reducing the number of persons eligible for legal aid.

The Attorney-General: The Government's policy is to target legal aid to meet need. The Lord Chancellor is conducting a review of the financial conditions for legal aid to see how this can best be achieved.

The number of full civil legal aid certificates issued compared with figures for five and 10 years ago indicates that more people than ever before are taking up legal aid. The figures are in the table:

	Number
1979-80	190,677
1984-85	221,209
1989-90	262,581

The estimated figure for 1990-91 is about 300,000. Over the same period, expenditure on legal aid as a whole increased some five fold.

Court of Protection

Mr. Steen: To ask the Attorney-General what is the cost to the Exchequer of the Court of Protection; and what is its fee income.

The Attorney-General: The operation of the Court of Protection is financed by those who use it. During the financial year ending 31 March 1991 there was no cost to the public purse.

The fee income for that year was £7,750,423·01.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Attorney-General how many patients the Court of Protection is currently handling.

The Attorney-General: The total number of patients whose affairs are currently being administered by the Court of Protection is 30,842 as at 30 April 1991.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Armagh Four

11. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress there has been in the review of the convictions of the Armagh Four; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mawhinney: A dossier on this case is receiving detailed examination. In the meantime, the Chief Constable of the RUC has been asked to make further inquiries about a number of points. Until the results of these further inquiries are known, it will not be possible for my right hon. Friend to consider whether he would be justified in referring the case back to the Court of Appeal.

Religious Tolerance

13. **Mr. Fahnery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to hold a representative delegate conference to raise issues conducive to religious tolerance and peace in Ireland.

Mr. Mawhinney: I have no plans at present to hold such a conference. I am pleased to report, however, that the Government have given substantial support to a number of conferences, including a major conference in September 1990, on the role of the churches in community relations in Northern Ireland.

Political Parties (Talks)

14. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on who will be representing the Conservative party at the talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I will represent the Government in the forthcoming talks.

Political Devolution

15. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received concerning the subject of political devolution in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the prospects for a political solution to resolve conflict in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan).

Recession

17. **Mr. Kilfedder:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to deal with recession in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The latest economic indicators suggest that any downturn in the economy has had less effect in Northern Ireland than in the United Kingdom as a whole. The Government's economic development strategy for Northern Ireland aims to improve the competitiveness of Northern Ireland industry and thereby promote economic growth and a sustained increase in employment.

Irish Prime Minister

18. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I have no present plans to meet the Taoiseach.

Self-Employed People

19. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently self-employed in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: At June 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 75,800 self-employed persons in Northern Ireland. This represents a growth in self-employment of some 16,600—28 per cent.—since June 1983.

Health and Social Services Boards

20. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the composition of the non-executive directors of the four area health and social services boards and the membership of the new health and social services councils.

Mr. Hanley: Each health and social services board includes six non-executive members plus a chairman. They were appointed from 1 April this year.

The names of the chairmen of the health and social services councils were announced on 4 April 1991. Nominations for membership of the councils have been invited from district councils, voluntary and community groups and, through public advertisement, from other interested groups and individuals. It is hoped to announce the names of the members shortly.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

21. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to review teachers' pay and conditions bargaining arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: At present my right hon. and noble Friend the Paymaster General has no plans to review the teachers' pay and conditions of service negotiating arrangements. Following the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee, the Department of Education makes regulations prescribing the rate of salaries and conditions of service.

Employment Trends

22. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on employment trends in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: At June 1990 the estimated number of persons in employment in Northern Ireland—including the self-employed—stood at 605,400, which is some 7,000 higher than the previous peak level in 1979. Annual estimates also show that the level of employment has increased consistently since June 1983. Between June 1983 and June 1990 employment in Northern Ireland grew by almost 51,000—9·2 per cent.—mainly due to an increase in employment in private sector services and self-employment.

Higher Education

16. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students are currently studying in universities and institutions of higher education in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The answer is 25,559 full-time and part-time students. Institutions of further education also provide higher education courses and in 1989-90 total enrolments on such courses—full time and part time—amounted to 3,444 students.

Construction Industry

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the number of persons employed in the construction industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available in Northern Ireland and also list for each of those years *(a)* the number of dwellings constructed and *(b)* the number of construction workers unemployed.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

	Employees in employment in construction industry[1]	*Number of unemployed construction workers*[1]	*Number of dwellings completed*[2]
1986	24,550	23,307	10,145
1987	25,840	21,964	9,761
1988	26,360	19,251	9,941
1989	25,990	17,938	10,304
1990	25,940	16,959	7,912

[1] Figures relate to June of each year.
[2] Figures relate to the calendar year.

Trust Ports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to announce the privatisation of the trust ports.

Mr. Needham: It is my intention to bring forward next spring a draft Order in Council which would provide the necessary powers to enable any of Northern Ireland's trust ports to be privatised.

Clenbuterol

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the highest level of clenbuterol found in cattle from County Laois in the Republic of Ireland which were presented for slaughter in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The answer is 27·2 parts per billion (ppb).

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many clenbuterol-treated cattle from County Laois in the Republic of Ireland have been presented for slaughter in Northern Ireland in the past 12 months;

(2) how many clenbuterol-treated animals from County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland have been presented for slaughter in Northern Ireland in the past 12 months.

Mr. Hanley: In the last 12 months two cattle from County Laois and 24 from County Donegal presented for slaughter in Northern Ireland have been found to contain residues of clenbuterol.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements exist for action against beef producers in the Republic of Ireland who present clenbuterol-treated animals for slaughter in meat plants in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: All such cases are communicated to the appropriate authorities in the Republic of Ireland and it is for them to decide on what, if any, action is taken against the producers concerned.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that all animals originating from a farm in one of whose animals clenbuterol has been detected at a slaughterhouse should have their urine tested; and if he will bring forward proposals for acquiring powers to detain animals which have tested positive for clenbuterol.

Mr. Hanley: I am considering such a policy under the powers available when the Food Safety Order comes into effect on 21 May 1991.

Salbutamol

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to carry out tests for salbutamol in animals, and to condemn meat in which salbutamol is found.

Mr. Hanley: Yes, if it becomes apparent that there is abuse of salbutamol. At present we are only aware of abuse of clenbuterol.

Beta Agonist Drugs

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many post-mortem tests are carried out each year on the eyeballs of bovines suspected of treatments with beta agonist drugs.

Mr. Hanley: Post-mortem tests concentrate on liver, as this is the edible tissue in which the highest levels of residue are found relative to the rest of the carcase. It also gives the most consistent results. The potential use of other tissue is being studied.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in which part of an affected animal have residues of beta agonist drugs most frequently been found by official inspections in the past 12 months.

Mr. Hanley: Residues of beta agonists have been found most frequently in the liver.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Community Charge Rebates

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of introducing a 100 per cent. rebate for community charge payers on income support and equivalent incomes in 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: A maximum community charge benefit of 100 per cent. of liability would affect all people receiving community charge benefit, including those on income support and equivalent incomes. The total cost in 1991-92 of 100 per cent. maximum community charge benefit would be some £380 million at current benefit levels.

This estimate assumes that no reductions are made in the income-related benefit levels which were adjusted in April 1989 to include help towards the 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge at an estimated cost of £500 million.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from 1986/7/8 family expenditure surveys.

Child Benefit

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how much will be saved from the clawback of the increase in child benefit of £1 from parents' income support;

(2) how many *(a)* single parents and *(b)* parents did not receive the child benefit increase of £1 because they are in receipt of income support and have had the increase deducted from their income support.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that approximately *(a)* 850,000 single parents and *(b)* 400,000 other families on income support have received the £1 increase in child benefit for the only, eldest or elder child from April. The payment of this extra amount has been taken into account for income support purposes in the normal way. It is estimated that the extra cost of disregarding the increase in child benefit in income support would be £65 million a year.

Income support rates were also increased from April, and it is estimated that over 99 per cent. of income support recipients will have seen an overall increase in their

benefits. Families will receive a further increase in child benefit in October and, exceptionally, the family premium and child allowances will be increased at the same time so that those on income-related benefits gain the advantage of that increase.

Source: 1989 ASE uprated to 1991-92 price and benefit levels.

Pensions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when is the appointed day for the imposition of new requirements for pension increases included in the Social Security Act 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: No final decision has yet been made.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the implementation of the provision in the Social Security Act 1990 which requires pension schemes to increase the deferred pensions of anyone leaving by 5 per cent. per annum for all of their pensionable service.

Miss Widdecombe: This provision came into force on 1 January 1991.

Benefits (Manchester)

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are receiving *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* housing benefit; and what percentage of the Manchester population this represents.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Bari Mustard Gas Disaster

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer, *Official Report*, 4 February, column *63*, if he will publish in the *Official Report* how many of the survivors of the Bari harbour mustard gas disaster in 1943 died of *(a)* lung cancer and *(b)* other forms of cancer.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Income Support

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's target for clearing income support claims at each Edinburgh office *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* in 1992; and what is the actual time taken to clear such claims at present.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the public information office.

Departmental Land (London)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much land his Department owns in London; and how much of that land is unused.

Mr. Jack: The Department owns 1·05 hectares of land in London, of which 0·2 hectares is unused. Disposal of this recently vacated site is being actively pursued.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total cost to the national insurance fund, in the financial year 1991-92 and in a full year, of allowing people to contract out of SERPs into a money purchase personal pension scheme giving figures separately for *(a)* people contracting out of SERPs in 1991-92 and *(b)* all schemes, giving figures also for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 April 1991]*: The amount of revenue forgone by the national insurance fund is made up of the contracted-out rebate which was first introduced in April 1978, and the 2 per cent. incentive payment introduced in April 1988.

The Government Actuary estimates that about 0·5 million people will receive payments towards personal pensions for the first time during 1991-92 and the estimated amount of revenue forgone by the national insurance fund in respect of those people will be £260 million for Great Britain, made up of £190 million rebate and £70 million incentive.

The estimated amount of revenue forgone in respect of the total of 4·5 million who will receive payments during 1991-92 will be £2,350 million for Great Britain, made up of £1,740 million rebate and £610 million incentive.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total cost to the national insurance fund in the financial year 1991-92 and in a full year of the 2 per cent. banded earnings offered as an incentive to opt out of SERPs, giving figures for Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 April 1991]*: In the year 1991-92 the Government Actuary estimates that the amount of revenue forgone by the national insurance fund as the result of the incentive payment will be £750 million for Great Britain. This is in respect of an estimated 4·5 million personal pension optants and 1 million members of contracted-out occupational pension schemes who are eligible for incentive payments.

The estimated amount of revenue forgone by offering the incentive in 1991-92 amounts to about 2 per cent. of the total income of the national insurance fund.

It is also estimated that encouraging people to plan for their retirement in this way will result in a reduction in gross public expenditure of £2 billion a year in 2010 rising to £14 billion a year in 2035.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 3 May 1991

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Students (Expenditure)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his answer of 29 April in relation to expenditure on higher education in the form of mandatory awards, if he will provide the information on expenditure per student on fees and expenditure per student on maintenance in real terms with 1978-79 = 100.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The data requested are given below and cover expenditure made by local education authorities in England and Wales in bestowing mandatory awards under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations.

	Expenditure per student (real index)	
Academic year	*Fees*	*Maintenance*
1978-79	100	100
1979-80	94	104
1980-81	101	104
1981-82	104	98
1982-83	57	93
1983-84	54	91
1984-85	52	80
1985-86	53	73
1986-87	52	74
1987-88	52	73
1988-89	51	72

The real index has been calculated using the retail prices index. The 1982-83 expenditure on fees is affected by a reduction in the rate set for first degrees and diplomas from £900 to £840 with compensating increases in the direct funds paid to institutions.

Education Support and Training

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much expenditure he intends to support in the 1992-93 grants for education support and training programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I propose a grants programme for 1992-93 supporting total spending by local education authorities of £377 million. This compares with a programme of £346 million in 1991-92.

The proposed programme will target resources to help implement the Government's key education reforms. It includes over £80 million to improve school management and £146 million for the national curriculum. Within these areas, I propose to increase the level of support for key priorities compared with last year: there would be £10 million for governor support; £14 million for teacher appraisal; £15 million to help meet the equipment needs of schools implementing the national curriculum; and £45 million for training and other support for national curriculum assessment.

I am proposing a major new initiative for the inner cities. The most important new policy would be a scheme to raise standards in identified schools facing particularly severe problems. I am also proposing a pilot scheme in a number of inner city areas to improve access by local people to higher education. The new projects, costing £8·6 million, would be concentrated in areas covered by the Government's city action teams and inner city task forces, and would be drawn up in consultation with these bodies.

Another new activity will support the development of regional projects designed to meet the special needs of deaf-blind children.

The programme will support a number of other priority areas, including teacher recruitment and induction of newly appointed teachers.

The package also includes support for schools wishing to introduce vocational qualifications in their sixth forms.

I am writing today to the local authority associations setting out my proposals in detail. I shall be issuing a draft circular shortly, in the light of any comments from the associations, inviting LEAs to bid for grant support.

The table lists my proposals in full.

Grants for education support and training 1992-93
Proposed programme

	£ million
School management and appraisal	
School administration/management information systems	37·5
Governor training	10·0
Central LMS implementation teams	10·0
School management training	11·0
Appraisal of teachers	14·0
TOTAL	82·5
National curriculum and assessment	
Books	15·0
Equipment	15·0
Primary maths/science designated courses	11·0
Other INSET and teacher support	54·0
Assessment	45·0
LEA inspection	6·0
TOTAL	146·0
IT in schools	30·0
Teacher supply	
Teacher recruitment	10·0
Induction training	2·5
Licensed teachers	10·1
Articled teachers	11·0
Teacher data transfer systems	1·0
TOTAL	34·6
Special educational needs	
Specialist SEN training	6·0
Training for SEN in ordinary schools	1·2
Training of educational psychologists	2·8
Deaf blind children	2·0
TOTAL	12·0
Vocational qualifications in schools	3·0
Under-fives	5·0
Management of training	20·0
Inner cities	
Raising standards in schools	6·6

	£ million
Pilot schemes for access to higher education	2·0
TOTAL	8·6
Youth and community	3·5
Health education	5·0
Further education	
College management	9·4
National vocational qualifications	7·0
Initial training of FE teachers	2·0
SEN in FE	0·9
TOTAL	19·3
Workers Educational Association	1·3
Continuing education support grants programmes	
Difficult pupils	2·6
Improving attendance	2·5
Multi-ethnic schools	1·1
Adult literacy	0·04
TOTAL	6·3
TOTAL	377·1

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Family Conciliation Services

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General what assistance his Department gives to the Cleveland family conciliation service.

The Attorney-General: No direct or specific central Government funding is or has ever been available for Cleveland family conciliation service. Indirect help is provided through the courts, the probation service and the legal aid fund in some cases. The Government are reviewing the future of, and funding for, conciliation services as part of their consideration of proposals to reform the divorce law.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General what is the Government's policy on the funding of family conciliation services.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member for Stockton, South to the reply given to the question from my hon. Friend, the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on 18 April 1991, at column *221*.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General what is the period which currently elapses between the lodging of an appeal against a refusal of leave to enter the United Kingdom which is lodged at an overseas diplomatic post and the time when the immigration appeals organisation at Thanet house notifies the appellant or its representative that the appeal has been lodged giving them a choice for an oral or written appeal; and if he will provide this information in respect of each country from which such appeals are lodged.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not available in respect of individual countries. However, it is estimated that the period which currently elapses between the lodging of an appeal against refusal of entry clearance to the United Kingdom at a diplomatic post overseas and its arrival at the Immigration Appellate Authorities, IAA, at Thanet house is on average one month for visit visa appeals and three months for settlement appeals.

Once the IAA has received an appeal, it is on average able to dispatch the case papers to the appellant or his representative in this country within one week for cases to be heard at Thanet house, and two to three weeks for cases to be heard at other hearing centres. At this stage, the IAA notifies the appellant or his representative that the appeal has been lodged and gives him a choice for an oral or written appeal.

ENVIRONMENT

Buildings (Security)

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will discuss with representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the secured by design group ways of raising standards and specifications in house and office buildings to make them more secure from illegal entry;

(2) if he will now consider introducing higher specifications and standards in the construction of houses in order to ensure a greater level of security from illegal entry;

(3) if he will discuss with representatives of British police authorities the standards of doors and windows fitted in new and existing houses and the vulnerability to illegal entry of such doors and windows.

Mr. Yeo: My Department is currently funding research into the effectiveness of security measures in buildings and the results will be made available to the British Standards Institution, which is the forum through which interested parties can contribute to the debate on the development of British standards and the United Kingdom's input to European standards.

Building Regulations

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy to broaden the definition of substantial demolition as part of the Building Regulations (part M) to cover *(a)* classification or determining the independence of an extension to a building, *(b)* that material alterations are taken into account and *(c)* that part M regulations cover the curtilage of the construction site so that concerns such as car parking space can be taken into account.

Mr. Yeo: My Department is conducting a review of part M of the Building Regulations as part of a wider review of the regulations as a whole. The issues raised by the hon. Member are being thoroughly considered by my Department and the building regulations advisory committee, together with other responses to the recent consultation exercise. I expect the revised guidance on part M to be published later this year.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure by the Countryside Commission on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: The following table gives the available information. No figures are available prior to 1 April 1982.

Year	*Expenditure on press and public relations* £
1982-83	24,644
1983-84	72,264
1984-85	171,668
1985-86	159,318
1986-87	162,164
1987-88	147,628
1988-89	176,543
1989-90	225,138
1990-91	[1]215,027
1991-92	[2]256,000

[1] Estimated.
[2] Budget.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure by Ordnance Survey on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Baldry: Records in sufficient detail to provide the information requested are held for seven years only. The available information is as follows:

Total expenditure on press and public relations

	£000
1984-85	696·2
1985-86	833·2
1986-87	751·3
1987-88	820·8
1988-89	737·1
1989-90	825·5
1990-91	1,119·4

This 1991-92 budget for press and public relations activities is £1,320,500. The increase in expenditure in the years 1990-92 is attributable to additional publicity for the Ordnance Survey bicentenary in 1991.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure by the Nature Conservancy Council on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: Direct expenditure on information and publicity is listed in the table. For 1989-90 onwards the figures are net of receipts.

(Nature Conservancy Council for England)

	£
1979-80	92,000
1980-81	120,000
1981-82	129,000
1982-83	135,000
1983-84	124,000
1984-85	166,000
1985-86	282,000
1986-87	460,000
1987-88	863,000
1988-89	849,000
1989-90	768,000
1990-91	748,000
1991-92	537,000

Wellington House

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it is his intention to sell Wellington house following the closure of the Crown Suppliers; and what is the latest valuation of Wellington house.

Mr. Yeo: No: it is not intended to sell Wellington house; the building is to be used to house other Government Departments. The latest valuation of Wellington house is £24 million.

Local Authorities (Capping)

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what limits he has set, or plans to set, for authorities capped for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend decided on 3 April to adopt principles for designating authorities for capping in 1991-92 which gave effect to the provisional criteria announced on 31 October 1990 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten). Applying these principles, he has designated authorities and proposed caps for them as set out in the table. Under the status these authorities had 28 days ending on 30 April in which they could either challenge or accept their proposed caps.

Six authorities—Somerset, Langbaurgh, Milton Keynes, Reading, Greenwich and Middlesbrough—accepted and my right hon. Friend has therefore in each case confirmed the caps for these authorities at the level he originally proposed.

Eight authorities—Basildon, Bristol, Ipswich, Lambeth, Norwich, Stoke-on-Trent, Warwickshire and Wirral—challenged their proposed caps and suggested alternatives as set out in the table. My right hon. Friend will consider their cases and all other relevant information before he decides on the level of the final caps, which may be the same as or different from the amounts he originally proposed.

My right hon. Friend will set out his final caps for challenging authorities in a draft order which he intends as soon as possible to lay before the House. If the House approves the draft he will set the final caps at levels specified in the order.

Proposals for Caps

	Original budget	*Budget reduction*	*Capped budget*	*Original charge*[1]	*Charge reduction*	*Capped charge*	*Original budget percentage over SSA percentage*	*Percentage increase over 1990*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£*	*£*	*£*		
Absolute excessiveness								
Basildon[4]	26·8	4·7	22·1	355	39	316	[5]121·2	
Bristol[4]	59·4	6·0	53·4	384	20	364	44·5	
Ipswich[4]	17·3	1·3	16·0	324	15	309	50·0	
Langbaurgh[3]	16·2	0·6	15·6	338	6	332	36·3	
Middlesbrough[3]	21·0	0·8	20·2	317	7	310	21·9	
Milton Keynes[3]	22·3	2·1	20·2	315	16	299	24·6	
Norwich[4]	16·5	1·5	15·0	293	16	277	25·1	
Excessive increases								
Greenwich[3]	215·5	2·5	213·0	258	16	242		6·2 [5](15·2)
Lambeth[4]	315·5	8·3	307·2	450	48	402		10·7 [5](6·5)
Reading[3]	18·7	1·0	17·7	334	10	324		11·1 [5](18·8)
Somerset[3]	274·7	2·2	272·5	[2]246-275	6	240-269		9·9 [5](3·0)
Stoke-on-Trent[4]	28·0	2·2	25·8	272	11	261		18·4 [5](14·4)
Warwickshire[4]	278·3	6·0	272·3	[2]269-366	16	253-320		11·4 [5](4·8)
Wirral[4]	246·2	11·1	235·1	336	45	291		20·0 [5](4·8)

[1] Original charges are after £140 general reduction in community charges.
[2] Indicates that charges vary between shire districts.
[3] Langbaurgh, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Greenwich, Reading and Somerset have accepted the proposed cap.
[4] Basildon, Bristol, Ipswich, Norwich, Lambeth, Warwickshire and Wirral have put forward an alternative at the level of their original budget; Stoke-on-Trent have put forward an alternative of £27·5 million.
[5] Figures in parentheses include percentage over SSA.

Short-term Leases

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to change the financial arrangements for short-term leases acquired by local authorities.

Sir George Young: The Department has today issued a consultation paper to all local housing authorities on the future of short-term leasing. We believe that this form of accommodation has a useful role to play in helping homeless families. We are proposing that, from 1992-93, new leases acquired by local authorities for a term of three years or less should be accounted for outside the housing revenue account. This will put them on a common financial footing with other property used by housing authorities as temporary accommodation for the homeless, but in which they have no long-term interest.

Swimming Pools

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of public swimming pools that have closed each year since 1979.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally. The overall number of public swimming pools has increased from just over 1,000 in the early 1980s to nearly 1,200 now.

PRIME MINISTER

Civil Defence

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Prime Minister what procedures he has established for co-ordination between the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and agencies of the United States Government regarding the levels of attack preparedness and the length of warning times applicable to future civil defence provision in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: Procedures governing co-ordination on warning times and related matters involve many Government Departments and there are a number of arrangements to which the United Kingdom and the United States of America are party the most important being those established with our NATO partners. All 16 NATO nations are currently discussing revisions to our mutual defence arrangements in the light of the substantial changes that have occurred in Europe.

As for the United Kingdom specifically, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be making an announcement about changes in our arrangements, including the planning assumptions that will underlie civil defence planning, in the summer.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Kurdish Refugees

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the role of the Crown Agents in providing emergency relief for Kurdish refugees.

Mrs. Chalker: The Crown Agents are playing an important part in procuring and delivering relief supplies to the relief organisations working in the region. They are currently supplying blankets, tents, clothing and food to a total value of just under £1 million on behalf of the European Community, the Overseas Development Administration, the British Red Cross and other charitable organisations.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure by the ODA on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 30 April, column 140.

EC-Namibia Fisheries Agreement

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what position Her Majesty's Government took on the suspension of negotiations for an EC-Namibia fisheries agreement; and whether he is taking any action to promote a resumption of negotiations.

Mrs. Chalker: The matter was raised in a recent meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the European Community. Along with other partners, we sought an explanation from the Commission, which has subsequently informed the Namibian Government that the suspension was purely temporary. We look forward to the resumption of negotiations. I shall be taking this up at the ACP ministerial meeting in Brussels next week.

Medical Teams

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements his Department is making to send out to Turkey and Iran British volunteer medical teams.

Mrs. Chalker: We are sending out early on 6 May, 90 medical and other volunteer relief workers to help Iraqi refugees on the mountains in the Cukurca region of Turkey and as they move back to their homes in Iraq. These initial teams will be under the direct supervision of the ODA's humanitarian aid co-ordinator, and will work in close co-ordination with British and allied forces in Turkey and Iraq. The operation is being co-financed with the European Community, as part of the Community's emergency aid programme announced on 8 April.

The Iranian authorities have not requested medical volunteers. We are however financing the provision of two field health centres in West Azerbaijan province.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by the Office of Data Protection Registrar on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Data Protection Registrar was first appointed in September 1984. I understand that his office incurred no significant promotional expenditure until the financial year 1985-86. Expenditure on press and public relations is shown in the table:

	£
1985-86	32,492
1986-87	50,212
1987-88	64,624
1988-89	44,780
1989-90	48,822
1990-91	54,163

The estimated expenditure for 1991-92 is £65,000.

Latchmere-Haslar Project

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason he has decided to withdraw Home Office funding from the Latchmere-Haslar project for refugees.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office has never provided core funding to the Latchmere-Haslar project. The payments made to it were exceptional and for one year and were intended to reflect the additional and transitional costs to the project arising from the transfer of detainees from Latchmere house to Haslar prison. The project's application last December for long-term core funding was turned down, on the grounds that the Government already make a substantial grant-in-aid to the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service to provide advice and representation and that, with limited resources, departure from the established practice of funding a single organisation in this way was not justified. My right hon. Friend is considering that decision further in the light of a substantial number of representations which we have received.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will undertake to refund local authorities the cost of any compensation which they may be required to pay in consequence of injunctions obtained in regard to Sunday trading, pending final determination of the issue by the House of Lords in consequence of the decision of the Court of Appeal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No. Local authorities receive a substantial contribution to their costs generally through the revenue support grant system. We have no plan to increase this contribution specifically for their enforcement duties under the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Paul Brown

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the error made by his Department in deporting the wrong Paul Brown to Kingston, Jamaica; what steps he has made in contacting him and informing him of his Department's error; what has been the result of the appeal made by the other Paul Brown; and what steps he has made to ensure such an error cannot recur.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 22 April 1991]*: A Mr. Paul Brown was removed to Jamaica on 7 July 1989 in the mistaken belief that he was subject to a deportation order which had been made against another person of the same name. Both men were Jamaican, both had been convicted of offences, and both had been recommended for deportation by a court. The Paul Brown removed on 7 July 1989 made no representations against his removal. If he wished to return to the United Kingdom he would have to qualify for entry under the immigration rules. Those rules provide that where a passenger has been convicted of an offence included in the list of extradition crimes leave to enter is to be refused unless the immigration officer considers admission to be justified for strong compassionate reasons. Mr. Brown had been so convicted and no steps have been taken to trace him in Jamaica.

The other Paul Brown was deported on 4 July 1990. He did not exercise his right of appeal to the higher court against his conviction or against the recommendation for deportation. The circumstances which led to the confusion of the two identities was most unusual and unlikely to recur. Nevertheless, magistrates courts have been asked to provide the person's date of birth and nationality when notifying my Department of a court recommendation. The Lord Chancellor's Department will be making similar arrangements for the Crown courts.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government are taking on asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 23 April 1991]*: In view of the increase in the number of people coming to the United Kingdom to seek asylum, the Government have been reviewing arrangements for dealing with asylum seekers. On 26 March, at columns *347-48*, I announced the introduction of a visa requirement for Ugandan nationals, who account for a significant proportion of asylum applicants in the United Kingdom. On 26 April, at column *566*, my right hon. Friend announced a nearly fivefold increase in staff resources for asylum determination and commensurate increase in other parts of the asylum system. The review is continuing and further announcements will be made as necessary.

DEFENCE

Chemical Defence Establishment, Nancekuke

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the evidence that decontamination of the former chemical defence establishment at Nancekuke, Cornwall has not been wholly effective.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, CBDE, under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the CBDE, Dr. G. S. Pearson to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Resolution Class Submarines

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many refits will be undergone by each Resolution class submarine.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The future refit programme of resolution class submarines is classified.

Service Married Quarters

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of service married quarters which are illegally occupied by otherwise homeless service families.

Mr. Alan Clark: There were 1,672 service married quarters irregularly occupied as at 31 December 1990.

Armed Forces Personnel

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, columns *35-36*, if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each of the armed forces, the number of *(a)* male officers, *(b)* female officers, *(c)* service men and *(d)* service women, who have taken premature voluntary release in each quarter since January 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No premature voluntary release, PVR, figures for females are available at present. The remainder of the information requested is as follows:

	Officers			*Service men*		
	RN/RM	*Army*	*RAF*	*RN/RM*	*Army*	*RAF*
1989						
January—March	34	103	54	560	1,042	900
April—June	56	194	101	627	1,051	981
July—September	80	238	70	724	1,018	884
October—December	60	138	107	633	990	757
1990						
January—March	38	142	67	670	1,002	648
April—June	79	220	103	716	963	713
July—September	69	180	74	814	1,020	785
October—December	56	122	57	737	755	623

Fuel Air Explosive Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the Government assessment of claims made by the Iraqi authorities at the Baghdad fair 1990 that they possessed fuel air explosive weapons.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We are not aware of a "Baghdad fair" in 1990. However, the Iraqis displayed what they claimed were fuel air explosive weapons of Iraqi origin at the Baghdad international military production exhibition in 1989. We cannot comment further on this matter.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of defensive measures to protect soldiers under attack from fuel air explosive weapons.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Fuel air weapons, FAE, are but one of a range of threats which are routinely examined when considering defensive measures for the British soldiers.

Nuclear Vessels and Submarines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear arms capable, or nuclear-powered vessels and submarines of the Royal Navy have been (i) completely scrapped, (ii) are in store or (iii) are in active service at the present time.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our practice to define Royal Navy ships as being nuclear-capable or non nuclear-capable. Four nuclear-powered submarines have been taken out of service, and are awaiting final disposal. Of these, one is stored afloat and three are being, or are about to be, decommissioned. There are currently 18 nuclear-powered submarines in service with the Royal Navy.

Nuclear Facilities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many square metres of floorspace used for the storage or maintenance of Royal Navy nuclear facilities have been (i) completely decommissioned and ready for alternative use, (ii) are held in reserve or (iii) are in active service at the present time.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Farm Machinery

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the investment in farm machinery in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what were the figures in 1980 and 1975, all figures in cash and in real terms taking 1975 as 100.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Investment in farm machinery[1]

	In cash prices £ million	*In real terms*[2] *(index 1973 = 100)*
1975	20	100·0
1980	33	84·3
1986	43	75·7
1987	42	69·9
1988	52	83·2
1989	58	85·4
[3]1990	59	79·7

[1] Tractors, vehicles and equipment (including plant).
[2] Calculated by deflating by the retail prices index.
[3] Forecast.

Agriculture

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the gross value of the output of the agricultural industry in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years and in 1980 and 1975 in cash and real terms, taking 1975 as 100.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Value of gross output of agriculture

	In cash prices £ million	*In real terms*[1] *(index 1975 = 100)*
1975	286	100·0
1980	546	97·6
1986	752	91·9
1987	776	91·0
1988	817	91·4
1989	866	89·8
[2]1990	853	80·7

[1] Calculated by deflating by the retail prices index.
[2] Forecast.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* farmers (full-time), *(b)* farmers (part-time), *(c)* agricultural workers (full-time) and *(d)* agricultural workers (part-time), were engaged in agriculture in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years and in 1980 and 1975.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Farmers*		*Agricultural workers*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1975	[1]25,500	[1]7,700	10,800	7,500
1980	27,600	10,900	7,900	5,700
1986	25,100	10,800	6,000	5,200
1987	24,600	10,800	5,800	5,200
1988	24,600	11,100	5,500	5,100
1989	23,200	11,800	5,300	5,400
1990	22,700	11,900	5,100	5,500

[1] Excludes 4,700 female owners, partners and directors for whom information is not available on whether they worked full-time or part-time in agriculture.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the gross profit in agriculture in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years and in 1980 and 1975 in cash and real terms, taking 1975 as 100.

Mr. Hanley: Gross profit data are not available. The following data relate to "total income from farming" which is the closest measure that equates.

Total income from farming

Year	*In cash prices* £ million	*In real terms*[1] *(Index 1975 = 100)*
1975	51	100·0
1980	48	48·8
1986	106	73·1
1987	156	103·0
1988	181	114·2
1989	212	123·7
[2]1990	169	90·0

[1] Calculated by deflating by the retail prices index.
[2] Forecast.

Universities

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in statistical form the staff-student ratios in Northern Ireland universities for the last five years, and whether additional capital funding will be made available to Northern Ireland universities to meet the need for additional residential accommodation and other physical resources, arising from increased student enrolments.

Dr. Mawhinney: The aggregate figures for the two universities in Northern Ireland are:

Year	*Student/staff ratio*
1985-86	11·9
1986-87	12·0
1987-88	13·0
1988-89	13·9
1989-90	14·2

Government funding of £5·5 million has recently been approved for a 3,000 sq m extension to the university of Ulster's Jordanstown campus. In addition, the Department of Education is considering a recommendation from the Universities Funding Council that the Department should provide grant aid for a further 1,700 sq m extension to the university's Magee campus.

No Government funding is at present being made available for additional residential accommodation.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of agricultural land in Northern Ireland is owned by overseas investors; and if he will list *(a)* the countries concerned and *(b)* the percentage of land owned by each.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not available.

Clenbuterol

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what proportion of herds suspected of being treated with clenbuterol is only a random sample of the whole herd tested; and if he will make it his policy to test all animals in a suspected herd.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* (I am considering the details of an on-farm testing regime under the powers available when the food safety order comes into effect on 21 May. On-farm testing for clenbuterol cannot be currently carried out.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* The information could not be made available in the form requested except at disproportionate cost. The figures for spending on all advertising and other promotional material are:

	£
1979-80	468,972
1980-81	487,393
1981-82	613,464
1982-83	1,550,896
1983-84	2,853,451
1984-85	2,699,659
1985-86	3,916,824
1986-87	3,787,628
1987-88	4,028,259
1988-89	4,606,655
1989-90	5,227,759
1990-91	[1]5,688,427
1991-92	[2]5,450,370

[1]Estimate
[2]Budget

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The totals are as follows:

	£
1979-80	Nil
1980-81	Nil
1981-82	Nil
1982-83	Nil
1983-84	Nil
1984-85	Nil
1985-86	52,380
1986-87	4,298
1987-88	2,411
1988-89	1,549,937
1989-90	3,194,988
[1]1990-91	3,413,313
[2]1991-92	1,726,000

[1]Estimate
[2]Budget

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure by the Forestry Commission on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total expenditure by the Forestry Commission on information services, shows, exhibitions and publications, including technical publications, is given in the following table. The figures include staff costs and overheads and have been rounded to the nearest £100,000. A more precise breakdown is not available.

Year ended 31 March	*Expenditure £*
1980	700,000
1981	800,000
1982	700,000
1983	700,000
1984	900,000
1985	1,200,000
1986	1,200,000
1987	1,200,000
1988	1,600,000
1989	1,900,000
1990	1,700,000

Year ended 31 March	Expenditure £
1991	[1]1,900,000
1992	[2]2,000,000

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by the Forestry Commission in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total expenditure by the Forestry Commission on advertising, legal fees, estate agent fees, and so on, in connection with the disposals programme is given in the following table. The disposals programme started in July 1981, so no expenditure was incurred in the two years ended 31 March 1981. The figures have been rounded to the nearest £100,000.

Year ended 31 March	Expenditure £
1982	500,000
1983	500,000
1984	800,000
1985	800,000
1986	700,000
1987	700,000
1988	600,000
1989	600,000
1990	800,000
1991	[1]600,000
1992	[2]700,000

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by the Scottish Development Agency in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92;

(2) what was the total expenditure by the Scottish Development Agency on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: These are operational matters for Scottish Enterprise, which succeeded the Scottish Development Agency on 1 April 1991, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

WALES

M4 Matrix System

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the matrix system on the M4 operates on GMT throughout the year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the total expenditure by the Welsh Development Agency on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92;

(2) what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by the Welsh Development Agency in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 1 May 1991.

All-Wales Treatment Centres

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the contracted through-put targets for each of the three all-Wales treatment centres for orthopaedic surgery, general surgery and ophthalmic surgery.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Throughput targets for 1991-92 are yet to be agreed.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report*, for 1990-91, for each of the three all-Wales treatment centres for orthopaedic surgery, general surgery and ophthalmic surgery, the contracted throughput targets, separately distinguishing the numbers by resident health authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The contracted throughput targets for the three all-Wales treatment centres in 1990-91 were:

	Number
a. Ophthalmic treatment centre, Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor	
Cataract operations	315
Other operations	29
Total	344
b. Orthopaedic treatment centre, Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, near Cardiff	
Hip replacements	233
Knee replacements	57
Other procedures	73
Total	363
c. General surgery treatment centre, Bridgend general hospital, mid Glamorgan	
Varicose vein and hernia operations	800
Total	800

Not more than 20 per cent. of the throughput at the orthopaedic and general surgery centres was intended for South Glamorgan and Mid Glamorgan residents respectively whilst at the ophthalmic centre, 20 per cent. of the throughput was aimed at non-Gwynedd residents. Throughput targets for 1991-92 are yet to be agreed, but are not expected to fall below the maximum throughput levels achieved in 1990-91.

Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Houses

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what purchase price will have to be paid by Swansea city council to repurchase prefabricated reinforced concrete houses; what formula is applicable; and what account is taken of the market price and presumed knowledge of the defects by the purchasers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Eligible properties would be repurchased by the authority at 95 per cent. of the defect-free value.

Singleton Hospital

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the job description of the consultant radiologist approved for Singleton hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for the district health authority.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new representations of substance he has received since the right hon. Member for Swansea, West presented a petition for the retention of the Singleton casualty unit; and what considerations were raised by the petition which required consultation beyond that already encompassed by his review.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The right hon. Gentleman presented his petition on 12 February. In the light of the right hon. Gentleman's representations, I visited the unit on 25 March and met a deputation of local residents, who handed me further letters. Three additional petitions, including another from the right hon. Gentleman, have been received.

In the light of these representations and my personal visit to the unit, I have consulted further within my Department. I am considering all matters put to me and hope shortly to announce the result of the review.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the latest figure he has available for the cumulative loan debt of the social fund and his estimate of what proportion is likely to be written off.

Mr. Scott: The cumulative social fund loan debt as at 31 March 1991 was £142 million. No social fund loans have been written off. All social fund loans are recoverable. Although there may be some circumstances where recovery is abandoned, this may be only temporary.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month at the most recent date for which this information is available.

Mr. Scott: On 30 April 1991, there were 1,243 applications for review by a social fund inspector which had been outstanding for more than one month. Additional inspectors have been recruited.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding at the end of February, March and April.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
February 1991	1,709
March 1991	1,923
April 1991	2,223

Additional inspectors have been recruited.

Expenditure

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, column *192-93*, regarding social security expenditure, if he will give the same information including expenditure on the unemployed.

Mr. Jack: Details of total social security spending from 1978-79 to 1990-91 are given in the table.

	Expenditure £ million		*Percentage change*	*Cumulative per-*
	Cash	*1990-91 prices*	*in real terms*	*centage change*
1978-79	16,602	41,882	—	—
1979-80	19,616	42,412	1·27	1·27
1980-81	23,751	43,396	2·32	3·59
1981-82	28,963	48,260	11·21	14·80
1982-83	33,000	51,240	6·38	21·18
1983-84	36,881	54,842	6·82	28·00
1984-85	39,949	56,533	3·08	31·08
1985-86	43,488	58,359	3·25	34·33
1986-87	46,841	60,763	4·10	38·43
1987-88	48,939	60,270	−0·81	37·62
1988-89	49,721	56,989	−5·44	32·18
1989-90	52,661	56,742	−0·43	31·75
1990-91	59,001	59,001	3·98	35·73

Note: The real terms decrease over the period 1987-88 to 1989-90 is largely attributable to the fall in unemployment since 1986.

Benefits

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the total amounts of social security benefits paid in each year since 1978-79 in respect of *(a)* council rents, *(b)* rates and *(c)* the community charge.

Miss Widdecombe: Data on help with housing costs are not readily available for years prior to 1983-84. The available information is in the table.

	Council rents (rent rebates) £ million	Community charge benefit and rate rebates £ million
1983-84	1,980	1,218
1984-85	2,145	1,354
1985-86	2,296	1,479
1986-87	2,420	1,635
1987-88	2,506	1,701
1988-89	2,680	1,373
1989-90	2,856	1,460
1990-91	3,180	2,272

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to issue for consultation his guidelines for visiting doctors on the care component of disability living allowance for *(a)* the under two-year-olds and *(b)* disabled people over the age of two; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans for consultations on the largely procedural guidelines for visiting doctors examining medical practitioners. We will, however, be consulting disability organisations and specialist groups in the near future on the guidelines for adjudication officers and the doctors who advise them, about the care and mobility effects likely to arise from different medical conditions. We shall also be consulting organisations about the self-assessment claim pack for disability living allowance which should enable many claims to be determined without the need for an examination by an EMP.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the value of the 20 per cent. poll tax compensation within income support in 1991-92 *(a)* for individual claimants and *(b)* in total.

Miss Widdecombe: The current value of the amounts which were included in income-related benefit levels in 1989 towards 20 per cent. of the community charge is equivalent to an average community charge for all claimants of £367. This compares with an estimated net average community charge for all income support claimants in 1991-92 of £210 across Great Britain as a whole, taking no account of capping. The estimated total cost of including these amounts in income-related benefit levels in 1991-92 is £540 million.

Pension Funds (Self-investment)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to bring forward proposals to use the powers contained in the Social Security Act 1990 to restrict self-investment by pension funds.

Mr. Newton: Because of the possible double jeopardy to job and pension that can be caused by a pension scheme investing in a related employer, broad powers were taken in the Social Security Act 1990 to restrict the practice. Messrs. Ernst and Young were asked to report on the overall extent of self-investment and any implications there might be in imposing restrictions. A copy of their report, "Study of Self Investment by Pension Fund", is being published and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Draft regulations have been referred for consideration by the Occupational Pensions Board. We propose that the overall proportion of a scheme's resources that may be self-invested should be limited to 5 per cent. Schemes that are currently above the limit will be required to take steps to reduce their level of self-investment, but only in respect of certain types of investments. A period of two years will be allowed for loans and equities listed on the stock exchange, and five years for equities traded on the unlisted securities market.

Most small self-administered schemes and individual insured schemes will be exempted from the regulations where written agreement by all the members is provided to each act of self-investment. Where schemes currently have holdings of property or equity in private companies, they will not be required to take action to disinvest. In such circumstances no further self-investment may be made.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the level of gross earnings in April at which *(a)* a single householder, *(b)* a married couple, *(c)* a married couple with two children aged four and six years and *(d)* a single parent with one child, aged three years, will lose in housing benefit, assuming full take-up of family credit, average rent and rates and other assumptions, as in his reply to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), *Official Report*, 1 December 1987, column 566.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 April 1991]*: The answer is set out in the table. It should be noted that the results in the table remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The table uses hypothetical rents so it does not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay. The table sets out separately the cut-off points for housing benefit, which, in the earlier reply to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) included rate rebate, and community charge benefit.

	Level at which housing benefit ceases		Level at which community charge benefit ceases	
	Gross earnings £ per week	Total net income £ per week	Gross earnings £ per week	Total net income £ per week
Single householder	87	77·02	76	74·64
Married couple	118	107·49	146	123·05
Married couple with two children aged 4 and 6	105	147·89	169	158·05
Lone parent with one child aged 3	91	131·76	62	128·37

Notes:

1. A community charge of £250 per person, per annum has been assumed throughout.
2. Average rents are assumed to be as follows: £21·23 for a single person and for a married couple; £23·43 for a single person with one child and £25·60 for a married couple with two children. All other assumptions are as set out in the published tax/benefit model tables.

Pensioners

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the achievements since 1987 and the present objectives of Her Majesty's Government's policies for caring for pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: Since 1987, the Government have maintained the value of the state retirement pension and have continued to pursue the sound economic policies which have been the essential catalyst for the growth in pensioners' income during the 1980s. In addition, the abolition of the earnings rule in 1989 has allowed older people to remain in employment without reducing their state pension. The increased prosperity which these policies have brought to an expanding number of older people means, for example, that over 70 per cent. of pensioners now live in homes which are centrally heated and 86 per cent. have access to a telephone.

At the same time, we recognise that there is still a need to protect the position of those who are less well off. As part of the April 1991 uprating of income-related benefits, the ordinary pensioner premium (for those aged 60 to 74) was increased by an extra £1 per week for single people and £1·50 for couples at a cost of some £80 million. This is in addition to a previous measure, taken in October 1989, which directed extra resources to older and disabled pensioners through income related benefits at a cost of £200 million in the first full year.

There have been significant increases in the help available towards fees for those pensioners living in residential care and in nursing homes—a total of £1,270 million went to some 189,000 recipients in 1990 of whom the vast majority are elderly.

The Government have also assisted those who wish to remain independent within their own homes. We have established, or helped to fund, a number of schemes, such as the minor works assistance grant, the disabled facilities grant and the home improvements agencies which provide independent advice and practical help for elderly people who wish to undertake repairs.

Of equal importance to the maintenance of independence is the support given carers in the community. The Department has taken its own measures to improve their lot both by increasing financial provision through the extension of invalid care allowance to married women and the recently introduced carer premium in the income-related benefits. The number of carers receiving ICA has increased from 11,000 in 1985-86 to an estimated 125,000 in 1990 and estimated expenditure is now £213 million.

Over the last 12 months we have introduced other measures which will help carers further. The amount a carer can earn without removing entitlement to ICA was increased from £12 to £20 in April 1990 and by a further 50 per cent, to £30 from April this year. A new carer premium was introduced into the income-related benefits in October 1990. Together with the abolition of the six-month qualifying period for attendance allowance for people with a terminal illness, this measure will cause a greater take-up of ICA. Finally, from October this year the carer premium will be extended to eight weeks after caring ceases.

Our primary objective for the future is to continue with and enhance the policies outlined in this reply—policies, for instance, which meant a real increase in income of 31 per cent. for the average pensioner in the first eight years of our term of office and which have helped nearly half of all pensioners to own their own home and nearly three-quarters to build up their own savings income. More particularly, the community care proposals outlined in "Caring for People", which will be fully implemented by 1993, will be shortly be providing a complete, locally determined package of care for those who will require it.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000 and *(c)* £20,000 a year.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the introduction of the upper limits specified would yield about *(a)* £700 million, *(b)* £250 million and *(c)* £150 million in a full year. The estimates do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by the department for national savings on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Estimated figures for expenditure in the years 1984-85 to 1991-92 on press and public relations, including sales information units, established 1989, but excluding staff costs, are as listed below. No figures are available for the years prior to 1984-85.

Year	*Press and public relations* £
1991-92	87,950
1990-91	75,650
1989-90	41,525
1988-89	20,000
1987-88	22,830
1986-87	17,500
1985-86	15,500
1984-85	15,500

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by the Inland Revenue on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: Information relating to the financial years 1979-80 to 1985-86 inclusive is not readily available and

cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost. The spend on press and external public relations activities for the remaining years is estimated to be as follows:

Year	£000
1986-87	580
1987-88	650
1988-89	810
1989-90	820
1990-91[1]	7,728
1991-92[2]	890

[1] Forecast outturn.
[2] Budget.

The figure for 1990-91 includes expenditure of £6·95 million on an advertising campaign to increase public awareness of the new arrangements, for non-taxpayers to register for payment of bank and building society interest without the deduction of income tax.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by HMSO on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: HMSO has commissioned no press and public relations work.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Total expenditure by HM Customs and Excise on press and public relations is as follows:

	£
1984-85	63,000
1985-86	87,000
1986-87	85,000
1987-88	89,000
1988-89	126,000
1989-90	92,000
1990-91	102,000
1991-92	[1]86,000

[1] Estimated expenditure.
The figures for 1979-1984 are not available.

Fees

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Nothing.

Chancery Banking Group

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each local authority that deposited money with the Chancery Banking group, and the amount deposited by each.

Mr. Maples: The information requested is confidential and is not available to the Treasury.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the effect on tax revenues in 1991-92 of freezing the additional personal allowance at £1,720; and what increase in one-parent benefit could be financed from this amount.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The yield in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income is estimated to be about £20 million compared with statutory indexation. This would finance a 30p per week increase in one-parent benefit.

National Savings

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees by the Department for National Savings to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* Figures for the years 1984-85 to 1991-92 are given in the table. No figures are available for the years prior to 1984-85.

Year	£000s
1991-92	[1]383
1990-91	349
1989-90	342
1988-89	424
1987-88	410
1986-87	308
1985-86	748
1984-85	684

[1] Estimate.

HMSO

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total sum paid out in fees by Her Majesty's Stationery Office to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* The records on HMSO's management information system do not differentiate between management and other consultancy, notably computer consultancy. The consultancy cost for each financial year is assessed as being:

Year	£
1983-84	70,000
1984-85	150,000
1985-86	400,000
1986-87	550,000
1987-88	400,000
[1]1988	155,000
1989	290,000
1990	400,000

[1] Nine months.

HMSO changed its financial year from the fiscal to the calendar year in 1988. Comparable figures for the years 1979-80 to 1982-83 could be given only at disproportionate cost. The consultancy budget for 1991 is £265,000.

Tropical Hardwoods

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to introduce additional taxes on the sale of tropical hardwoods; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 2 May 1991]*: I have no present plans to do so. Deforestation is a global problem requiring a concerted response, rather than piecemeal imposition of taxes by individual nations. The environment White Paper includes a number of measures to promote sustainable development of the tropical timber industry.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kuwait

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), *Official Report*, 24 April, column *453*, if, during his visit to Kuwait, he will make urgent representations against the proposed show trials of Palestinians followed by public hangings or firing squads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will reiterate to the Kuwaiti authorities the importance of ensuring that all residents of Kuwait are treated fairly and humanely and in accordance with the law and with their fundamental human rights.

Human Rights

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland of 24 April, *Official Report*, columns *455-6*, whether he will give details of the specific complaints expressed by the United Nations Committee on Human Rights during the presentation of the United Kingdom's third periodic report on 1, 2 and 3 April.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have yet to receive the summary record of the human rights committee's proceedings. As soon as it is available, copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

I can inform the hon. Member, however, that the committee questioned our delegation in detail on a wide range of issues in the United Kingdom and dependent territories. It was concerned in particular with issues relating to Northern Ireland, Hong Kong, the optional protocol to the international covenant on civil and political rights and the incorporation of the covenant into domestic legislation.

Convention on Inhumane Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the 1981 convention on inhumane weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the written answers given to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 14 March, and 22 April, on the same subject, at cols *634* and *293* respectively.

EMPLOYMENT

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure by the British tourist authority on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Forth: These matters are the responsibility of the board of the British tourist authority and I am asking the chairman to write directly to the hon. Gentleman.

Employment Training

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether training providers in Bradford are to be paid only when trainees secure employment.

Mr. Jackson: The contracts for training in Bradford are negotiated between training providers and the Bradford training and enterprise council. The financial details of these contracts are commercial in confidence.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the reduction in training places, especially for those with special needs, in Bradford in the coming year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I have not received any recent representations concerning training places for those with special needs in Bradford. It is for Bradford training and enterprise council to decide with whom it contracts to provide training to meet local needs.

Gas Surge (Royston)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if he will list the actions he has taken since the gas surge in Royston on 8 March in order to prevent a recurrence of this event.

Mr. Forth: *[pursuant to his reply, 18 April, column 221]* I regret that the answer contained an incorrect statement in that it said that British Gas had replaced approximately 4,000 metres of pipeline. The correct information is as follows:

Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive are carrying out a full investigation into the gas incident in Royston on 8 March. HSE will decide what action, if any, is appropriate when the investigation is completed.

I understand that British Gas has replaced approximately 4,000 gas meters as a result of the incident.

Industrial and Occupational Health Problems

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent research he has funded into industrial and occupational health problems; and what guidance he has offered to employers as a result.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 30 April 1991]*: The Health and Safety Executive, HSE, funds both intramural and extramural research projects into industrial and occupational health problems.

There are 87 occupational health projects presently contracted at universities, research institutes and Medical Research Council, MRC units. HSE's occupational medicine and hygiene laboratory also has a significant programme in this area.

In addition to this research, investigations are mounted by doctors in HSE's employment medical advisory service, EMAS and epidemiological studies are conducted by HSE's epidemiology and medical statistics unit.

The production of guidance notes for both employers and employees relies upon the results from these intramural and extramural research projects, EMAS investigations and epidemiological studies.

Full details of HSE's current research are listed in its 1991-92 "Programme of research and related services". A copy is available from the House of Commons Library.

Baggage Allowance

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will initiate a survey of the impact that an increase in baggage allowance for passengers on British airlines flying to and from British airports would have on encouraging visitors to Britain to take advantage of these services.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

I have no plans to initiate such a survey. Baggage allowances for passengers travelling on British airlines are a commercial matter for the airlines themselves.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list his Department's statutory responsibilities to overview and control British Rail's operations and those matters which fall within the operational responsibility of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Under section 3 of the Transport Act 1962, it is the duty of the railways board to provide railway services in Great Britain, and to have due regard to efficiency, economy and safety of operation. The Secretary of State's responsibilities include, in section 27 of the Transport Act 1962, powers to give the railways board directions of a general character as to the exercise and performance of its functions in relation to matters affecting the national interest. The Secretary of State may also, under section 3 of the Railways Act 1974, give directions to the board imposing on it obligations to provide passenger services that it would not provide on a commercial basis and to compensate it for the losses incurred. Since 1 April 1988, this obligation has not applied to InterCity.

Baggage Allowance

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there are any plans to increase the baggage allowance for passengers flying on British airlines to and from British airports to match those of other countries.

Mr. McLoughlin: Baggage allowances are not fixed by the Government but are a commercial matter for the airlines themselves to determine, subject only to being filed with the Civil Aviation Authority as part of the normal tariff approval procedures. I am not aware that the baggage allowances set by British carriers are significantly different from those of their foreign competitors.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by year for the last 10 years, to date, the number of air misses that have been reported to the Civil Aviation Authority in the region of the Humber estuary; and if he will give the location and the types of aircraft involved.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

Date	*Aircraft model*	*Aircraft model*	*Latitude*	*Longitude*
1983				
22 December	Westland WG30	Model A10	5341N	00001W
1984				
5 April	S 61 (civil models)	Model A10	5342N	00005E
19 April	Sikorsky S76	Model A10	5339N	00003W
8 May	Westland WG30	Tornado GR	5343N	00006E
14 May	Westland WG30	Model F111	5342N	00006E
7 September	Friendship F27	Medium Jet (type unknown)	5341N	00002W
1986				
23 April	Cessna 150	Model F111	5336N	00024W
23 September	Super Puma Tiger helicopter	F4 Phantom	5341N	00002W
1987				
20 October	Cessna 404	Model A10	5435N	00012W
1988				
28 April	Tornado GR	S 61 (civil models)	5345N	00005E
21 June	Skyhawk 172	Tornado GR	5336N	00027W
18 July	Friendship F27	Cessna 150	5334N	00025W
10 August	Cherokee	Model A10	5342N	00007W
6 September	Friendship F27	Skyhawk 172	5344N	00014W
22 November	Dauphin SA 365	Model F111	5339N	00006E
1989				
9 January	Sikorsky S76	Jaguar	5342N	00008W
11 May	Dauphin SA 365	Jetstream SC4, BAE 31	5336N	00020W

Date	Aircraft model	Aircraft model	Latitude	Longitude
1990				
16 January	Dauphin SA 365	Model F111	5341N	00011E
16 February	Sikorsky S76	Buccaneer	5342N	00016W
7 June	Dauphin SA 365	Model A10	5338N	00000E
12 July	Dauphin SA 365	Model F111	5342N	00009E
2 August	Dauphin SA 365	Model F111	5340N	00010E

Note: The selected area is between 5332 and 5345N and between 0011E and 0027W, below 5,000 ft. There were no airmisses in the selected area in 1981, 1982 or 1985.

Track Circuit Failures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the results of his Department's investigations into the two track circuit failures that occurred during February at *(a)* Aberdeen and *(b)* Wymondham; and how many (i) railway staff and (ii) passengers were being carried in each incident.

Mr. Freeman: The incident at Aberdeen, which was reported to the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate, involved the derailment of an empty passenger train with only the train crew on board. The incident at Wymondham, which was not statutorily resportable, involved a track maintenance machine carrying a permanent way gang. The actual number of staff concerned is not known. No passengers were involved in either incident.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he received the British Rail signal and telecommunications technical investigation report 91019 DC track circuits discussion of residual voltage and wrong side failure modes with special reference to bonding principles, dated 25 March; what action he has taken in respect of the report's findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate received a copy of this report on 1 May, and is now considering it. Meanwhile, BR has taken action to avoid a recurrence.

Safety Standards (Cars)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there are absolute safety standards governing the construction of motor cars and vehicles in the United Kingdom; and whether there are any proposals for an EC directive on the subject.

Mr. Chope: Yes. All new cars and goods vehicles must meet at least the saftey standards in national vehicle type approval. Type approval is based largely on standards agreed in the EC and in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and it covers the inspection of prototype vehicles and manufacturers' arrangements for ensuring conformity of production. An EC-wide whole vehicle type approval scheme is being developed, to allow manufacturers the option of obtaining whole vehicle approval in any EC member state, but this will not in any way comprise safety standards.

A17

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he received with regard to the proposed A17 Leadenham bypass in Lincolnshire; if he will give the reasons for his decision to overrule the inspector's report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The letter of 24 February issued on behalf of the Secretaries of State for the Environment and of Transport explained their decision in detail. I will send the hon. Lady a copy.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Decommissioning

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet representatives of the fishing industry to discuss a decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Curry: If the industry produces workable proposals for an industry funded decommissioning scheme together with effective measures for long-term conservation, I will examine them.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to introduce legislation to prevent the import of dangerous dogs.

Mr. Sainsbury: A ban on such imports would present serious practical difficulties because it would clearly be impossible to identify on import whether individual dogs would later prove dangerous; controls would thus have to focus on identifiable breeds but cross-breeding would allow evasion; and smuggling would be encouraged, so adding to the risk of rabies spreading into the United Kingdom. Dangerous dogs pose problems regardless of whether they are imported or domestically bred. A Home Office consultation paper published in June last year on "The Control of Dogs" sought views on a range of possible remedies. Responses are currently being considered before the Government announce their decisions.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total expenditure by the Export Credits Guarantee Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Sainsbury: The total expenditure of the ECGD on press public relations is shown below:

Year	£000
1985-86	541
1986-87	703
1987-88	747
1988-89	1,112
1989-90	1,271
[1]1990-91	1,067

[1] Provisional.

For the years 1979-80 to 1984-85, the expenditure was recorded by the central office of information as an allied service. The budget for 1991-92 has still to be finalised, and will depend on developments in the privatisation process.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Sainsbury: The total sums paid out by the ECGD in fees to outside organisations in the futherance of privatisation since 1979-80 are as follows:

Year	£000
1979-80 to 1988-89	Nil
1989-90	103
1990-91[1]	3,413

[1] Provisional

The budget for 1991-92 has still to be finalised, and will depend on developments in the privatisation process.

The costs of the current privatisation of the short-term business of ECGD, including fees paid to advisers, will be reported to Parliament after the sale is completed.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Export Credits Guarantee Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The ECGD does not have any statistical divisions.

HEALTH

Lincolnshire Health Authorities

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were employed by the North Lincolnshire health authority in March 1979 and March 1991, respectively.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Due to the re-organisation of health authority boundaries in 1982, figures for North Lincolnshire health authority prior to this date are not comparable with the figures for later years. The table shows the figures for 1982 and 1989, the earliest and latest years for which comparable information is available.

The reduction in the number of nurses employed is due in part to a mental handicap unit at Caistor being transferred to the management of Yorkshire regional health authority, instead of Trent regional health authority.

North Lincolnshire Health Authority
Nursing and midwifery staff[1] at 30 September

	1982	1989
Whole-time equivalents[2]	2,270	2,230

Source: Dept of Health (SMI3C) annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.

[1] Includes agency staff.

[2] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.

Children in Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the average weekly cost per child or young person in care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about the costs to local authorities of children in care expressed in terms of cost per child week for different types of accommodation are published in the reports under the Child Care Act 1980 entitled "Children in Care in England and Wales". The most recent publication is for the year ending 31 March 1988, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the number of children and young persons in care; and if he will give details of the reasons for their admission.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest estimate of the number of children and young persons in care is for 31 March 1989. It is estimated that 62,148 children and young people were in care then. The numbers in care have fallen by 32 per cent. since 1979. The table shows this broken down by legal status and reason for current episode. These figures are provisional.

Children in the care of local authorities at 31 March by reason for entering care, England

England

Reason for entering care	1989
Received into care under section 2 of the Child Care Act 1980	
Short-term illness of parent or guardian	1,668
Long-term illness or incapacity of parent	1,122
Confinement of mother	199
Family homeless	304
Parents are dead no guardian	317
Abandoned or lost	1,122
Death of parent	895
Deserted by parent	3,134
Parent or guardian in prison or custody	414
Unsatisfactory home conditions	5,460
Other reasons	9,072
Sub-total	23,707
(Percentage of total)	(38%)
Committed into care by order of the courts	
On remand or committed for trial	615
Subject to interim care order	2,101
Sub-total	2,716
Committed by care orders made under the Children and Young Persons Act 1969:	
S.1(2)(a) neglect, ill treatment	14,990
S.1(2)(a) neglect, ill treatment of another child in household	1,699
S.1(2)(bb) member of household convicted of an offence against children	296
S.1(2)(c) moral danger	957

Reason for entering care	*1989*
S.1(2)(d) beyond parental control	1,911
S.1(2)(e) not receiving full time education	1,070
S.1(2)(f) 7(7) guilty of an offence	2,122
S.15(1) in place of a supervision order	790
S.25(1)/26(2) transfer of a care order	29
Sub-total	23,864
Committed by care orders made under other Acts	
Section 43(1) of the MCA 1973	3,627
Section 10(1) DPMCA 1978	160
Section 7(2) of the FLRA 1969	6,409
Section 2(2)(b) of the GA 1973	1,180
Section 17(1)(b) of the CA 1975	16
Others	469
Total number of children in care	62,148

NHS Trusts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each established national health service trust *(a)* the level of any staff reductions proposed, *(b)* any proposed changes in the level of services and *(c)* their current financial position.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. National health service trusts have extensive freedom to manage their own affairs. However, trusts will be obliged to publish an annual report and accounts.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the national health service units which are currently being considered for self-governing trust status.

Mr. Waldegrave: To date, 59 of the 130 hospitals and other units that expressed an interest in becoming a trust by April 1992 have submitted formal applications. Others continue to arrive daily. They are as follows:

Northern regional health authority
- Cleveland ambulance services
- Gateshead Community Unit
- Northgate Hospital, Northumberland
- North West Durham hospital and community unit
- North Tees acute and community services
- Royal Victoria and dental hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne
- South Tees acute hospital services

Yorkshire regional health authority
- Airedale health services
- Bradford mental health and community services
- Northallerton health services
- York health services

Trent regional health authority
- South Yorkshire metropolitan ambulance services
- Weston Park hospital, Sheffield

East Anglian regional health authority
- East Suffolk community unit
- Huntington acute and Hinchingbrooke hospitals

North West Thames regional health authority
- Barnet community health services
- Barnet and Edgware hospitals
- Northwick Park hospital
- Hillingdon community health unit
- North West Hertfordshire mental handicap unit
- South Bedfordshire community and mental health services
- Bedford general hospitals
- Luton and Dunstable hospital

North East Thames regional health authority
- Essex ambulance services
- North Essex healthcare
- North East Essex mental illness unit
- Royal London homoeopathic hospital
- Southend community care services
- Forest healthcare

South East Thames regional health authority
- King's healthcare unit
- Dartford and Gravesham priority services
- Tunbridge Wells mental handicap unit

Wessex regional health authority
- Bath district mental health unit
- Bournemouth and Christchurch acute unit
- Poole acute unit
- East Dorset community services
- Royal United hospital, Bath
- Wiltshire healthcare
- Avon and Somerset community unit

Oxford regional health authority
- Aylesbury Vale priority services unit
- East Berkshire mental handicap unit
- Horton general hospital
- Milton Keynes acute and maternity services unit
- Milton Keynes community and mental health services unit
- West Berkshire mental handicap unit
- Heatherwood and Wexham park hospitals

South Western regional health authority
- Royal Cornwall hospitals
- Frenchay acute and community services
- Southmead acute and community services
- Gloucester ambulance services
- Devon ambulance services
- Greater Bristol unit
- Exeter community services

Mersey regional health authority
- Liverpool community and priority services
- Mersey regional ambulance services
- Mersey regional centre for neurosciences
- St. Helens and Knowsley community unit
- Southport acute unit

North Western regional health authority
- Oldham acute and community services.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has decided not to proceed with any of the proposed national health service trusts which he has already announced.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will decide which of these hospitals and other units will be approved for trust status once he has fully examined their applications; considered the views expressed in the public consultation process; and is satisfied that they can fulfil the criteria for moving into trust status.

Census

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement explaining the procedures under which the questions in the census form are determined; what is the specific purpose of various questions in the current census; and if he will take steps to ensure that future census forms take account of the right of privacy of individuals in society.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An account of the consultation and testing procedures, the topics covered and the uses to which the statistics on each topic will be put is given

in paragraphs 9 to 23 of the White Paper 1991 Census of Population, Cm. 430, of July 1988, which set out the Government's proposals. An account is also given, at paragraph 24, of the topics that were considered but excluded as a result of the selection process.

The importance of privacy is a prime consideration when assessing the public acceptability of census questions. This, and the need to keep the census form to an acceptable length, will continue to be key considerations in planning any future census, as will, of course, the need to keep private the personal information people put on their forms. The Census Act 1920 strengthened by the Census (Confidentiality) Act of earlier this year, gives legal protection to the confidentiality of personal census information.

Northern RHAs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number, size and nature of service increment for teaching and regional contracts placed with provider units by the Northern regional health authority for 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Peter Carr, the chairman of Northern regional health authority for details.

Haemophiliacs

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with the settlement of the litigation by those haemophiliacs infected with HIV; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am pleased to be able to announce that a formal offer conveying the detailed terms of the settlement has now been made to the plaintiffs' representatives. The new trust, which will administer the payments, the Macfarlane (Special Payments) (No. 2) Trust, is being set up today.

Payments can begin as soon as acceptances have been received from individual plaintiffs and the settlement has been approved by Mr. Justice Ognall. This should be within a few days.

Full details of the payments to be made under the settlement will be given once those details have been announced in open court.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his proposals for regulations under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department of Health has published for consultation proposals for regulations under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. It is proposed to bring these regulations into force on 1 August. The main provisions of the Act will come into force on that day, and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will assume its full powers.

The regulations will cover the composition of licence committees; licensing procedure; extension of the maximum storage period for gametes in specific circumstances; exemption from licence requirements for those keeping and examining gametes or embryos in connection with the investigation of, or proceedings for, an offence; and for storage of gametes for purposes which are not intended to be controlled by the Act.

The Department has also published for consultation proposals to ensure a smooth transition to the new licensing system. These do not form part of the regulations, but will be contained in a commencement order.

The Department has sent proposals for these regulations to a wide range of professional bodies, relevant treatment and research centres and other interested organisations. I am arranging for copies to be available in the Vote Office. The Department will consider all comments received carefully in formulating the regulations which will be laid before Parliament.

Infertility

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to lay regulations to bring the infertility treatment known as GIFT within statutory control.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have no plans to take further steps to regulate GIFT at the moment, but we intend to keep this matter under review.

Treatments subject to statutory control under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act include those which involve the creation of a human embryo outside the body and those which involve the use of donated or stored gametes or embryos. GIFT is not intended to secure the creation of an embryo outside the body. Where it involves the storage or donation of any gametes, GIFT will be subject to the licensing provision of the Act because it falls within the second category set out above. Thus provision already exists to safeguard those involved in treatment in these circumstances. But in other cases, for example, when the husband's sperm is used, it will not. Many centres offering GIFT will also have to be licensed under the Act because of other treatments they provide, for example, in-vitro fertilisation. This means that these centres will need to comply with the provisions of the Act and follow the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's code of practice.

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking in respect of information about their donor parents for children born as a result of infertility treatment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Regulations under section 31(4)(a) of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 can require the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to give specified information at age 18 or later to an applicant born following treatment services involving the use of donated gametes.

This raises profound issues which require wide-ranging consultation. We do not therefore propose to introduce regulations at this time, and donors will remain anonymous.

Family Planning

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that all health authorities and national health service trusts follow the 1974 memorandum of guidance on family planning and make

male and female sterilisation operations available under the national health service, both for family planning and medical reasons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national health service management executive is writing to all regional health authority general managers about the provision of male and female sterilisation operations.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities and national health service trusts which do not make available male and female sterilisation operations under the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 15 April at column *80*.

COMARE Investigations

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment is still investigating the possible causes of leukaemia and lymphatic cancer among under nine year olds living near nuclear establishments;

(2) whether the findings of Dr. Gardner at Sellafield are part of the brief of COMARE.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes.

Preliminary advice on Professor Gardner's findings from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment was published in the *Official Report* on 2 April 1990 at columns *430-34*. In formulating further advice to Government, the Committee will take the results of Professor Gardner's study into consideration, along with the results of other studies, either completed, under way or planned.

COMARE's work programme as at January 1990 was set out in the reply that my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) on 10 January 1990 at columns *662-63*. COMARE is currently engaged in a review of the possible health effects of radioactive discharges from the Sellafield installation in the light of new data which has emerged since the committee reported on the position in west Cumbria in 1986.

COMARE is expected to have completed this review by the middle of next year. Other major areas in COMARE's current and future work programme include the following:

i. the incidence of childhood cancer in the vicinity of Scottish nuclear sites, other than Dounreay;
ii. consideration of the results of the case-control study of childhood cancer in the vicinity of Aldermaston and Burghfield, results expected in early 1992;
iii. consideration of the results of other studies recommended in previous advice to Government;
iv. consideration of the results of a major study of the geographical distribution of childhood cancer on a nationwide basis, results expected 1992;
v. participation in a review of the evidence relating to the incidence of childhood cancer around nuclear installations, once the results of the geographical studies—see iv above—are available.

Employment of Children

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he anticipates giving approval to city of Bradford metropolitan council byelaws, concerning the employment of children submitted on 25 October 1989; what are the reasons for the delay in the granting of approval; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Bradford metropolitan council's draft byelaws were resubmitted to the Department following earlier consideration and were received on 20 December 1990.

Having considered the revision, the Department is now content with the draft byelaws and is writing to the council setting out further procedures it needs to follow.

NHS Internal Market

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authority has responsibility under the national health service internal market for meeting the costs of travel, overnight accommodation and escorts when a patient from one health authority area is sent for treatment at a district hospital in another health authority area.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the new contracting arrangements, purchasers of health services—mainly district health authorities and fund holding GPs—will be responsible for meeting the costs of treatment given to their residents or patients; this will include the costs of ambulance transport—with an escort—if this is considered medically necessary. For other journeys, the hospital travel cost scheme provides full or partial reimbursement for the cost of travelling to hospital where patients are in receipt of income support or family credit; others on low income may also get help.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 7 May 1991

CIVIL SERVICE

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what was the total cost of running the Government quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in the two most recent years for which figures are available.

Mr. Renton: Details of total expenditure by non-departmental public bodies can be found in "Public Bodies 1990", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

ENERGY

Renewable Energy Programmes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list his Department's current and planned renewable energy programmes in Scotland by type, cost, site location and capacity.

Mr. Moynihan: A total of 38 renewable energy projects currently being carried out under my Department's research, development and demonstration programme have a contractor or site located in Scotland. They comprise:

Technology	*Projects*	*Contract Value £ million*
Wind	14	15·5
Biomass	13	2·8
Solar	6	0·8
Geothermal	1	0·6
Wave/Hydro	4	0·3

Wind
3MW Aerogenerator at Burgar Hill
60 WTG performance monitoring phase 4
Additional monitoring of Shetland HWP 750
Wind turbine control systems modelling and design
The influence of noise on wind turbine design
Yaw system loads of HAWTS
Evaluation of the concept of a stall limited rotor
Fast acting control of wind turbines
Wind energy resource in Caithness and Sutherland
MS-3 for NEL test site
Feasibility of testing WT incorp advanced tip cont rotor
Aerodynamic braking and control devices HAWTS
Development of MW-rated WTS using WEG LS-1 orkney
Design/test controller for variable speed turbine

Biomass
Elucidation of interspecies interactions
Peat as fuel
RDF combustion
Straw ash chemistry study
Straw combustion—Fluid bed boiler
Harvesting processing and storing trials
Support services in forestry for energy
Development of fuelwood harvesting systems
Forest residue communition and screening
Single stem trees as energy crops
Large scale trials of short rotation coppice
Trials of single stem energy plantations
Trials of short rotation coppice phase 2 and 3

Solar
Development bredem for passive solar application
Consultancy for the CEC Passys test cell project
Internal convective heat transfer coefficients
Continued participation with CEC Passys project
ESP support and enhancement
Operation of an extended pilot DAS

Geothermal
Seismic monitoring in South West England

Wave/Hydro
Telemetry demonstration
Small scale low cost wave power device phase 2
Transfer of PDP2 tapes
Consultancy on review of NEL—OWC

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much has been allocated in research and development moneys by his Department to cover *(a)* nuclear power and *(b)* renewable energy in each year from 1979.

Mr. Moynihan: The figures are given in the table:

	Nuclear energy £ million	*Renewables £ million*
1979-80	145·5	8·2
1980-81	188·0	11·3
1981-82	203·2	15·3
1982-83	212·4	12·7
1983-84	203·8	11·9
1984-85	196·2	14·9
1985-86	189·6	13·6
1986-87	159·7	12·5
1987-88	141·0	16·1
1988-89	159·3	16·3
1989-90	135·9	17·9
1990-91	133·5	20·3
[1]1991-92	93·4	24·5

[1] Estimate.

Nuclear Reactors (Decommissioning)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what research is under way to establish the cost and feasibility of full decommissioning of nuclear reactors;

(2) how many nuclear reactors are fully decommissioned; and at what cost;

(3) what information he has as to whether Nuclear Electricity has a fully costed strategy for decommissioning its remaining Magnox reactors.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No commercial reactors in the United Kingdom have yet been fully decommissioned. Nuclear Electric and AEA Technology have programmes of research relating to the decommissioning of nuclear reactors which have the objectives to ensure the continued safety of the public, work force and the environment; to minimise environmental impact; to release land for other use as appropriate; and, consistent with the foregoing, to minimise expenditure.

AEA Technology is proceeding with a programme to fully decommission the prototype advanced gas-cooled reactor at Windscale by 1998 to demonstrate both decommissioning capabilities and costs involved.

Nuclear Electric's current strategy for decommissioning its nuclear power stations is set out in its report and

accounts for 1989-90, which also identified the accounting provisions made for future decommissioning costs, which were based upon Nuclear Electric's estimates of those costs.

Windfarm Developments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to introduce revised procedures and modify the requirements for detailed site-specific information for windfarm developments of less than 5 MW.

Mr. Moynihan: The procedures to select projects to be contracted in fulfilment of a non-fossil fuel obligation are a matter for the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency Ltd.—NFPA—as the agent of the regional electricity companies on which the obligation is placed. The procedures adopted by the NFPA take into account the statutory requirement to make arrangements which "will secure" the specified amounts of non-fossil generating capacity and the need for advice from the Office of Electricity Regulation on whether the draft contracts available to the NFPA would be likely to meet this requirement.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will give details of the cost incurred in debt write-off prior to the privatisation of the electricity generation and distribution companies in England; and what percentage of the total debt this is;

(2) if he will give details of the cost incurred in debt write-off for the electricity generating and distribution companies prior to privatisation; and what percentage of the total debt this is.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No debt write-off occurred in connection with the privatisation of the electricity industry in England and Wales. On flotation, moreover, the companies bore new debt to Government totalling £3·583 billion overall, which will accrue to the taxpayer in addition to the proceeds from the sales.

Initial Nuclear Feasibility Study

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions since February 1989 officials from his Department have met representatives from British Nuclear Fuels to discuss the initial nuclear feasibility study; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of these discussions.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The study is still at an early stage. My officials have been kept informed of its progress in the course of their regular meetings with British Nuclear Fuels plc.

National Grid Company

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Grid Company concerning the environmental health implications of electro-magnetic radiation from overhead supergrid lines on nearby residential properties.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Department's engineering inspectorate is in regular contact with the National Grid Company in respect of electromagnetic fields and keeps me fully informed on the matter.

Power Failures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the number of power failures that have occurred in the Doncaster area during the past 12 months giving *(a)* location, *(b)* reason for breakdown and *(c)* the duration of the breakdown until supply was resumed; and what were the figures 12 months ago.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Only supply interruptions of a major nature are required to be reported to the Secretary of State under regulation 35 of the Electricity Supply Regulations 1988. Essentially these interruptions involve 20 MW or more, or 5 MW for one hour or longer or more than 5,000 consumers for one hour or longer. During the past two years no such interruptions involving the Doncaster area have been reported by Yorkshire Electricity other than the blizzard of 8 and 9 December 1990 which affected major parts of Doncaster.

Oil Fires (Kuwait)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his talks in Kuwait in relation to British, American and Saudi action to extinguish oil fires.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his visit to Kuwait, including his meeting with the Kuwaiti Prime Minister on 27 April; and what discussions were held regarding putting out the fires in oil wells caused by the Iraqi armed forces prior to the liberation of Kuwait.

Mr. Wakeham: I visited Kuwait on 26 to 28 April with a team of British business men. This visit was part of our response to the request made by the crown prince to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that Britain should play a substantial part in the reconstruction of Kuwait. My meetings with the crown prince and with Kuwaiti Ministers were very positive and encouraging and I believe that United Kingdom industry will be able to make a significant contribution both to solving the urgent problem of extinguishing the fires and capping the wells and to the reconstruction of Kuwait's oil industry. The most immediate effect of my visit is the Kuwait Oil Company's intention to commission the Kuwaiti British Fire Group, a joint venture of AMEC, Taylor Woodrow and Wimpey, to undertake a damage assessment survey of a number of wells in northern Kuwait. If the Kuwaiti authorities are satisfied with the findings of this survey the fire group is likely to be appointed to put out the fires and cap the wells in that part of Kuwait.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimate he made of the ferocity and consequences of oil fires in Kuwait in *(a)* October 1990, *(b)* November 1990, *(c)* December 1990, *(d)* January 1991, *(e)* February 1991, *(f)* March 1991 and *(g)* April 1991, (i) pre and (ii) following his official visit to Kuwait to assess the extent of the conflagration.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government's latest view of the consequences of the oil fires in Kuwait remains as stated in the assessment by the Departments concerned, entitled "The Potential Impact of the Burning Oil Wells in Kuwait on the Environment and Human Health" a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House on 15 April 1991.

The main purpose of my visit to Kuwait was part of the follow-up to the request made to the Prime Minister by the crown prince on 6 March that Britain should play a substantial part in the reconstruction. I led a team of business men, most of whom had specialist expertise in the oil and gas industries, to investigate opportunities for British industry, as a result of which I have every reason to believe that a group of United Kingdom companies will be awarded a contract to carry out a damage assessment of one of the oilfields.

This is expected to lead to major opportunities for British industry to work on extinguishing and capping burning wells and restoring oil production.

TRANSPORT

Rail Freight

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the level of United Kingdom use of rail for freight relative to other members of the European Community.

Mr. Freeman: The UIC's "International Railway Statistics 1989" gives the following figures for freight carried by rail.

	Rail traffic lifted Tonnes (millions)	*Rail traffic moved Tonnes kms (millions)*
Belgium	81·1	9,400
Denmark	7·9	1,700
France	153·8	54,600
Germany	621·5	121,500
Great Britain	143·1	16,700
Greece	n/a	n/a
Holland	21·5	3,300
Italy	66·7	21,300
Luxembourg	17·8	700
Portugal	7·3	1,800
Republic of Ireland	n/a	n/a
Spain	38·3	14,400

Train Accidents

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many people are recorded as having fallen from British Rail trains in each year from 1981 to 1991;

(2) how many people have died as a result of falling from British Rail trains, in each year since 1981.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows. The figures for 1990 are provisional. Information for 1991 is not yet available.

Number of persons fallen from British Rail trains

Year	*Total*	*Killed*	*Major injury*	*Minor injury*
1981	60	16	11	33
1982	55	11	7	37
1983	75	13	6	56
1984	82	14	11	57
1985	66	16	8	42
1986	61	12	15	34
1987	70	26	16	28
1988	64	19	13	32
1989	47	19	16	12
1990	31	19	4	[1]8

[1] Provisional.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

CSCE

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Lord President of the Council what part the United Kingdom Parliament played in the conference of parliamentary representatives from the member states of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe held on 1 to 3 April.

Mr. MacGregor: The President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Spanish Parliament, Senor Felix Pons, wrote to Mr. Speaker inviting six members of the United Kingdom Parliament to attend this conference. Following discussion through the usual channels, a delegation led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) attended the conference. The other members of the delegation were:

Mr. Frank Cook
Mr. Patrick Duffy
Sir Geoffrey Finsberg
Sir Michael Marshall
Lord Montgomery of Alamein

Delegations from all 34 CSCE participating states attended the conference and agreed to establish a CSCE parliamentary assembly in which the United Kingdom Parliament will have 13 seats. I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of the final resolution agreed by the delegates.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vagrants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley on 29 January, *Official Report*, column 455, when the branding of vagrants was abolished from the Justices of the Peace Act 1361; what sections of this Act are still in force; and if he has any plans to bring in new legislation within this Act.

Mr. John Patten: On the first part of the question, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 29 January at column *455*. As to the remainder, the Justices of the Peace Act 1361 is not organised into sections. The extant power from the 1361 Act is for magistrates to make binding-over orders. We have no present plans for legislation in this area.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review committee exploring the wider use of police criminal records to report; whether the committee explored the practice of employers and local authorities forcing data subjects, prior to employment, to exercise their right of subject access under the terms of the Data Protection Act with respect to personal data held by the police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The report of the efficiency scrutiny into criminal records was received on 24 April. It deals with various aspects of the question of disclosure from the criminal records, including the issue of enforced subject access for the purpose of job applications. The report is being considered in accordance with the interdepartmentally agreed arrangements for the conduct of efficiency scrutinies.

Prisons (Heating)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those of Her Majesty's prisons that have coal-fired boiler heating.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The list of prisons which have heating supplied via coal-fired boiler houses is as follows:

Ashwell, Nottingham
Deerbolt, Norwich
Feltham, Onley
Full Sutton, Rudgate
Gartree, Risley
Garth, Stoke Heath
Highpoint, Standford Hill (Part)
Hindley, Stocken
Long Lartin, Thorn Cross
Littlehey, Thorpe Arch
Lowdham Grange, Wayland
The Mount, Wymott

Police Cells

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list by police stations in South Yorkshire how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females were held in police cells for the latest date he has available; and if he will show in his answer for each police station the longest length of stay a prisoner in each category has been held;

(2) what is the longest period *(a)* a male and *(b)* a female has been held in a police cell in South Yorkshire due to shortage of prison space following the Strangeways prison riot.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On Thursday 2 May a total of 24 prisoners were held in police cells in the South Yorkshire police area. All were male and all were held at Doncaster police station. No female prisoners have been held in South Yorkshire police cells as a consequence of the prison disturbances in April 1990. Information about the length of time which individual prisoners have spent in police cells is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms Offences

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is collected by *(a)* the Home Department and *(b)* police forces on the number of persons convicted of firearms offences who were in possession of a firearms certificate at the time when their offence was committed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Police forces would incur disproportionate cost in collating this information. It is, therefore, not available centrally.

Pucklechurch Remand Centre

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects Pucklechurch remand centre to be brought back into use.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am considering a range of prison estate planning issues, including the future of Pucklechurch remand centre. I hope to be in a position to reach a decision in the near future.

Prisons (Baby Food)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department is he will take steps to ensure that women in mother and baby units in prisons are allowed to prepare fresh foods for their babies.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by women prison establishment those that *(a)* do and *(b)* do not allow mothers who are in prison with their babies to prepare fresh food for their babies other than manufactured baby food.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The provision of food in the three mother and baby units varies with the nature of the accommodation and the age of the children.

At HM prison Askham Grange, where mothers may keep their babies with them to the age of 18 months, fresh food is prepared for all the babies by one of the mothers.

At HM prison Styal, where babies may stay until nine months old, a range of both proprietary baby food and fresh food is available and mothers may choose in consultation with the nursing sister how to feed their babies. The food is prepared by the cook on the unit.

At HM prison Holloway, where the age limit is also nine months, mothers are provided with a range of propriety brands of food for their babies, supplemented by fruit juice and milk. Consideration is being given to extending the range of food available. Mothers may also purchase fresh fruit for their babies from the prison canteen.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the number of strip searches carried out on females sentenced category A and remand prisoners being held in Her Majesty's prisons Durham and Brixton since November 1989; if any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being conducted; and what were the reasons for the search.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Between 1 November 1989 and 30 April 1991, category A women prisoners held in Durham and Brixton prisons were strip-searched on a total of 244 occasions. No unauthorised article was found. On no occasion did the prisoners refuse to be strip-searched. Strip searching is a routine security measure to which all prisoners male and female are subject, both for its deterrent effect and as a means of discovering unauthorised articles.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Office of the Data Protection Registrar.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand that the Office of the Data Protection Registrar does not have a press and public relations office. The registrar is advised by a public relations agency on public relations matters generally.

Motoring Offences

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the past five years for offences committed by motorists in yellow box junctions; and what evaluation his Department has made of their effectiveness.

Mr. John Patten: Separate figures for offences committed in yellow box junctions are not available centrally. The Home Office has not carried out any evaluation of yellow box junctions recently.

Squatters

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *143*, what conclusions he has reached on plans to revise the law relating to squatters and second homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We expect to announce the outcome of our review as soon as possible.

Thamesmead Estate

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan police on the policing of the Thamesmead estate, with particular reference to the police response to allegations of racial harassment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The Metropolitan police continue to give a priority response to racial incidents, as the 1991 strategy statement makes clear.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will obtain for his Department's Library a recording of the LWT "London Programme" broadcast on Friday 26 April, about law and order in Thamesmead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office monitors recordings or transcripts of all television programmes dealing with substantive law and order issues. The specific policing matters raised in the LWT "London Programme" broadcast on 26 April are for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Forensic Science Services

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it takes on average for forensic science laboratories to analyse blood samples from the date of arrival at the laboratories concerned.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not readily available in the form requested. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police authority in England and Wales, the average time in 1990-91 for forensic science laboratories to analyse blood samples from the date of arrival at the laboratories concerned.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not available in the form requested.

Drug Trafficking

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive a report from the working group set up to review the provisions on the confiscation of drug traffickers' assets.

Mr. John Patten: I am pleased to announce that the working group has now completed its consideration of the provisions of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986. Its report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library, was published today. It contains a number of important proposals designed to make it easier for the courts to apply the confiscation provisions and to enforce confiscation orders once they are made. In view of the innovatory nature of some of these proposals, it is important that we should give the public and key interest groups an opportunity to comment on what has been proposed. We shall therefore welcome comments on any of the issues raised. In the light of responses to the document, which we are seeking by 12 June, we shall consider what legislative measures need to be taken to strengthen the existing procedures.

The working group is now examining the parallel confiscation provisions contained in part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield for capital gains tax for the years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and what is the anticipated yield for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: The following table shows the receipts of capital gains tax and the estimated total liability to capital gains tax arising on gains realised in each of the years since 1987-88. Capital gains tax receipts in any year reflect liabilities for the previous and earlier years.

Year	*Capital gains tax receipts in the year* *£ million*	*Estimated capital gains tax liabilities on gains realised in the year* *£ million*
1987-88	1,379	2,500
1988-89	2,323	1,900
1989-90	1,854	[1]2,100
1990-91	[2]1,855	[1]1,200
1991-92	[1]1,400	[1]1,500

[1] 1991-92 Financial Statement and Budget Report forecast
[2] Provisional

These figures exclude capital gains of companies taxed within corporation tax.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of capital gains tax paid was paid at 40 per cent. in (*a*) 1988-89, (*b*) 1989-90 and (*c*) 1990-91.

Mr. Maude: Capital gains tax receipts in 1988-89 correspond to gains realised in 1987-88 and earlier years which were taxed at a flat rate of 30 per cent.: no capital gains tax was paid at 40 per cent. in 1988-89.

It is estimated that the proportion of capital gains tax receipts attributable to liabilities charged at the higher rate

of 40 per cent. was about a half in 1989-90 and three quarters in 1990-91. The increase in the proportion mainly reflects the reduction between 1989-90 and 1990-91 in receipts attributable to gains realised in 1987-88 and earlier which were taxed at 30 per cent.

These figures exclude gains realised by companies which are chargeable to corporation tax.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of staff employed by the Inland Revenue in regard to capital gains tax; and what was their cost for the latest year available.

Mr. Maude: The estimated staff usage on capital gains tax work in 1989-90 was 1,261 man years, with a direct cost of some £27.5 million.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the revenue cost for the latest year available of the loss allowance provisions within the capital gains tax system.

Mr. Maude: I regret that appropriate information is not available centrally on which to base a reliable estimate.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the breakdown for capital gains tax receipts as between equities, property, land and other capital gains for 1990-91.

Mr. Maude: The provisional estimate of receipts from capital gains tax in 1990-91 is £1,855 million. It is estimated that about two thirds of these receipts arose from gains on shares and other financial assets with the remainder attributable to gains on land, property and other tangible assets. For a more detailed breakdown by asset type of net chargeable gains arising from disposals made in 1987-88, I refer my hon. Friend to table 11.6 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1990". The figures exclude gains realised by companies which are chargeable to corporation tax.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current capital gains tax percentage change on equity gains in (i) the United States of America, (ii) Germany, (iii) Japan and (iv) France; and what information he has as to whether there is a time limit to the application of any equity change on gains in these countries.

Mr. Maude: The latest available information is given in the table, which is supplemented by notes.

The general rule in these countries is that if gains are taxed at all they are added to income and taxed at the ordinary income or corporation tax rate as appropriate, but various reliefs and exemptions may apply.

None of these countries has the equivalent to indexation which substantially reduces the effective rate of tax in the United Kingdom. Apart from Japan, none of the countries has an equivalent of the United Kingdom annual exemption.

Country	*Nominal rates of tax on equity gains of*	
	Individuals	*Companies*
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*
USA[1]	15 or 28 plus state tax	15-34 plus state tax
Germany[2]	19-53	50
Japan[3]	10-50 plus local taxes 5-15	37·5 plus local taxes 17-20
France[4]	16 or 5-56·8	34

Notes:

1. *USA* Most states impose a state tax on both individuals and companies. In California, the most populous state, the top rate of 9·3 per cent. produces effective maximum rates of approximately 34 per cent. for individuals and 40 per cent. for companies. The tax rates are the same for long-term gains (i.e. on assets held for more than one year) and short-term gains (on assets held for less than one year).

2. *Germany* Private gains for individuals are not subject to income tax unless they arise from sale of equities within 6 months of date of acquisition or from disposal of more than 1 per cent. of shares in a corporation in which the individual owned a substantial interest (more than 25 per cent. of share capital). Companies' gains are taxable however long an asset has been held.

3. *Japan* The first 500,000 yen (£1,527 at latest available purchasing power parities rate) of gains of individuals in a year are exempt. Only one half of long-term gains (on assets held more than 5 years) is taxable. Individuals may elect to be taxed on equity gains at 20 per cent. (plus local taxes), in which case the special deduction does not apply and the whole gain is taxable. Companies' gains are taxable however long an asset has been held.

4. *France* Special 16 per cent. rate applies where individual has long-term gain (on assets held for at least 2 years) or gain on sale of shares which constitute part of a substantial interest in a company. Long-term gains of companies are taxed at 19 or 25 per cent. depending on the type of security held.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Department for National Savings.

Mr. Maples: The full complement of staff including vacant posts employed in the press office of the Department for National Savings on 1 April each year 1979-91 was as listed in the table. There is no record of how many posts were vacant at these dates.

	Numbers
1 April 1979	6
1 April 1980	6
1 April 1981	5
1 April 1982	5
1 April 1983	4
1 April 1984	4
1 April 1985	4
1 April 1986	4
1 April 1987	4
1 April 1988	4
1 April 1989	4
1 April 1990	4
1 April 1991	3½

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: The information is as follows:

Year	*Complement*	*Staff in post*
1981	6	6
1982	6	6
1983	6	6
1984	6	6

	Manyears
1985	14
1986	16
1987	18
1988	21
1989	22
1990	22
1991	21

No figures are available for the years prior to 1 April 1981. The figures shown for the years 1981 to 1984 relate only to the Inland Revenue press office. Since 1984 both press and external public relations activitities have been part of the wider duties undertaken by the Department's communications group. There are thus no complements for these later years, and the figures are estimates of the manyears employed on the functions in question. The increase in numbers from 1985 onwards is due to an increase in activity on public information services, including local radio phone-ins, a mobile inquiry centre and the schools education service.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mr. Maples: HMSO has had no press and public relations office from 1979 to the present date. Press and public relations reponsibilities have formed a small part of the duties of one nominated officer.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of HM Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The number of staff in the press and information office of HM Customs and Excise is as follows:

	Complement	Staff actually employed
1979-80	8	4
1980-81	7	6
1981-82	7	6
1982-83	7	6
1983-84	7	6
1984-85	7	5
1985-86	7	6
1986-87	8	7
1987-88	8	5
1988-89	9	7
1989-90	9	5
1990-91	11	9
1991-92	11	9

Pensions

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to review the indexation of public sector pensions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have no plans to do so.

European Coal and Steel Community

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* grants, *(b)* loans and *(c)* at what rates of interest for loans, have been made by the European Coal and Steel Community to retail organisations in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years; and what is his estimate of the effect on the competitiveness of the receiving companies and/or bodies as compared to their rivals in the market place for their goods and/or services.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply. There have been no such grants, but one "conversion" loan in 1990 and one in 1991. There may have been sub-loans made under global loans through financial intermediaries but information about these is not available.

The purpose of ECSC conversion loans is to assist with the creation of employment for people made redundant from the coal and steel industries. The loans are available in designated areas throughout the European Community. The criteria applied are set by the Commission. I cannot estimate the effect on the competitiveness of the recipients.

The rates of interest attached to any individual line are a matter of commercial confidentiality between the borrower and the Commission.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Scab

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received on the new controls relating to sheep scab; and how many of these representations are critical of the self-regulatory nature of the controls.

Mr. Maclean: The Department has received a number of representations about the self-certification arrangements which applied during last autumn's compulsory national dip for sheep scab and all contained some criticisms of the move to owner declarations by farmers.

We have completed our assessment of the 1990 national dip and the success of the self-certification arrangements and it is clear that large numbers of owner declarations were not returned to local authorities at the end of the dipping period, as required by the legislation. All comments from interested organisations on the national dip have been carefully considered and, as a result, we have decided to streamline the arrangements to apply during this year's compulsory national dip for sheep scab which will take place during the period Sunday 22 September to Saturday 2 November.

The requirement in the Sheep Scab (National Dip) Order 1990 for undipped sheep moved during the dipping period to be accompanied by an owner declaration will be dropped. This will reduce the number of forms that farmers are required to complete and will scale down the involvement of market authorities in countersigning forms at markets.

I hope that the Government's positive response to suggestions from those involved in the national dip on how to improve the arrangements will result in greater commitment from the industry on sheep scab control measures. Last year's response was disappointing and we shall be looking for a much better response from farmers this year on the completion of owner declarations.

Feline Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cats have been diagnosed as suffering from feline spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: Spongiform encephalopathy has been confirmed in 15 cats in Great Britain and one in Northern Ireland.

Brown Hare Syndrome

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he has any evidence linking European brown hare syndrome with oilseed rape;

(2) what is his estimate of the mortality levels caused by European brown hare syndrome.

Mr. Maclean: Although the grazing of "double low" varieties of oilseed rape was initially suspected as one of the possible causes of European brown hare syndrome, there is no evidence linking oilseed rape with the disease. A virus is now considered to be the likely cause. Mortality may be high in any one incident, but the proportion of diseased animals is unknown and it is not yet possible to assess the wider impact on the hare population.

Rhizomania

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many incidents of rhizomania have been reported in the United Kingdom in the last three years; and what action he has taken to combat the disease.

Mr. Curry: Two cases of rhizomania were found in 1989 and three cases, on adjoining farms, in 1990. These cases, which were all in Norfolk, were identified in the extensive survey for rhizomania which we carry out annually. The only previous identification of the disease in this country was at a farm in Suffolk in 1987.

We operate a range of controls, including import controls, to combat this disease. Where it is found, we require strict hygiene measures to prevent spread of the disease by movements off the farm and restrictions are placed on cropping on the farm. These normally involve grassing down infected fields, some limitations on root crops on other parts of the farm and a ban on growing sugar beet or planting material. The exact nature of these restrictions will depend on the circumstances of the case.

Wool

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement concerning his assessment of the prospects of British wool producers in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Curry: Returns from wool production form, on average, 5 to 10 per cent. of individual producers' total returns from sheep farming. Prospects for wool producers thus depend on a range of factors, including market prices and input costs. Prices for finished lambs in 1991 so far have been following the usual seasonal trends and prices for British wool, although weak, have shown some improvement in recent sales. In addition, United Kingdom sheep farmers enjoy significant financial support through the EC sheep regime and hill livestock compensatory allowances. This support, which takes account of both market prices and income levels, is likely to total some £394 million in 1990.

EC Surplus Food

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how subsidised foodstuffs from EC surplus stocks are now distributed round the United Kingdom; what are the criteria used; how frequently such distributions are made; and what are his plans for the future of these distributions.

Mr. Curry: The distribution of surplus butter and beef relies on the voluntary participation of charitable and other non-profit-making organisations. The method and timing of distributions are matters for these organisations themselves to decide according to local needs and their own resources. In order to meet the requirements of European legislation, only the homeless and destitute, people in receipt of income support or family credit and people living in welfare hostels are eligible to receive produce under the United Kingdom scheme.

We will shortly announce the future arrangements for distribution.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will prohibit breeding from the offspring of BSE-affected cattle.

Mr. Maclean: No.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations his Department has received from local authorities regarding the case for national policy guidance in respect of the need for, and situation of, additional incinerator capacity for bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected carcases.

Mr. Maclean: We have received a number of representations from local authorities which are considering planning applications for incineration plants seeking advice on the disposal of suspect bovine spongiform encephalopathy carcases. The State Veterinary Service will provide advice and information to any local authority which seeks it.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the effects of disposal of bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected carcases by means of incineration.

Mr. Maclean: Incineration is a safe, effective means of disposal, leaving only sterile ash.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on his policy relating to the transport and processing of carcases affected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy and the recommended means of disposal;

(2) if he will make a statement of his Department's policy relating to the scale and distribution of additional incinerator capacity for the disposal of bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected carcases in the south-west peninsula;

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected carcases that will require disposal by incinerator annually in the south-west peninsula over the next *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years.

Mr. Maclean: The carcases of suspect bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases are disposed of by burial or incineration. Although both are safe, well-established methods, incineration in plants which comply with strict conditions laid down by the Ministry for storage and incineration is preferable. Carcases are moved under licence to these incineration plants, and the vehicles used must comply with the licence conditions.

Within the south-west region there are two incineration plants in which suspect bovine spongiform encephalopathy carcases are incinerated. However the disposal of carcases is handled on a national basis and is not restricted by regional or other boundaries. Carcases that originate in the south-west are not necessarily incinerated there.

At the moment over 90 per cent. of carcases are incinerated. Our aim is to deal with all carcases in this way and we hope shortly to have sufficient capacity to do so. Nevertheless, we would consider contracting with any incineration plant which can meet our standards and has obtained the necessary local authority planning consents and approvals.

Baby Food

Miss Lestor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will bring forward proposals to require manufacturers of baby food to declare the meat content of the products, just as manufacturers of ordinary meat products do.

Mr. Maclean: The European Commission has issued a draft directive that lays down compositional and labelling requirements for cereal-based and other processed foods for infants and young children. The proposals contain minimum content levels for meat and certain other characterising ingredients. Negotiations in Brussels are scheduled to commence early in June. The Commission also intends to introduce proposals on quantitative ingredients declaration of foodstuffs shortly.

Irrigation

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the leaflet "Good Irrigation Practice, Make Every Drop Count" is made available to every holder of a spray irrigation licence in England and Wales.

Mr. Curry: The leaflet, which concentrates on an early warning system for farmers of impending restrictions by the National Rivers Authority, was intended to go to every licence holder in England and Wales. In the event, the authority was unable to introduce the warning system outside its Anglian region this season, and leaflets have therefore gone to licence holders in that region only.

Aluminium

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of research on bioavailability of aluminium from food and water at the trace metabolism unit at Southampton.

Mr. Maclean: The work being carried out at Southampton university, which is being funded by the Ministry, is an initial pilot study to investigate the feasibility of measuring differences in aluminium absorption from different foods and beverages. Results are expected later this year and will be assessed to see whether further work should be commissioned.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to ensure the safe disposal of alphachloralose and other pesticides which are held by individuals but which no longer have approved use under the pesticide regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Advice on disposal of unwanted pesticides is given in a code of practice for the safe use of pesticides by this Department and the Health and Safety Commission, which was issued last year. Detailed consideration is now being given to a scheme to offer the collection and disposal of unwanted pesticides held on farms, which would be run by trade associations. This will complement the long-term campaign, launched in March, to persuade those who abuse pesticides such as alphachloralose to kill wildlife that this practice is wrong and unnecessary.

Advertising

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to his answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 25 April, *Official Report*, column *556*, if he will give a further breakdown of his Ministry's expenditure on other publicity materials for each year between 1984-85 and 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* The information available is as follows:

	1988-89 £'000	*1989-90* £'000	*1990-91* £'000	[1] *1991-92* £'000
Food Safety	409	1,263	1,104	2,700
Environment	7	94	139	310
Imports (Control of Imported Animal and Plant Disease)	232	213	282	325
Animal Welfare	27	50	82	150
Grant Aid Schemes	194	90	70	87
Research and Development	0	4	54	74
Miscellaneous Campaigns (e.g. MAFF Touring Exhibition)	135	659	648	500

[1] Forecast.

Publicity material produced by this department, other than modest amounts of press advertising, consists of publications, exhibitions and audio visual/video, as well as associated market research and distribution. Individual

projects employ a mixture of these media as appropriate. Figures provided for the period 1988-89 to 1991-92 are available following a change in the way expenditure is recorded. Comparable figures for 1984-85 to 1987-88 could only be made available at disproportionate cost.

Official Meetings

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will list the number of occasions during the last 12 months on which he has held official meetings with (i) the National Farmers Union, (ii) the Food and Drink Federation, (iii) the Retail Consortium, (iv) the Consumers Association and (v) the National Consumer Council.

Mr. Gummer: I have held six official meetings with the National Farmers Union on bovine spongiform encepathology and allied subjects, at which the main issue was the responsibility of the farming community to the consumer. I have had four meetings with the National Farmers Union to discuss the technicalities of the price fixing and other EC issues of direct concern to farmers. In addition, I have held the three formal consultation meetings involving the National Farmers Union on the wool guarantee, the autumn hill review and the price fixing, and three on specific subjects (the milk marketing boards, salmonella compensation and landlord/tenant law). I addressed the National Farmers Union annual general meeting on 12 February and will send a copy of my speech to the hon. Gentleman. I also had a courtesy visit from the new National Farmers Union president after his election.

The Consumers Association and the National Consumer Council both nominate members to the Ministry's consumers' panel and their senior officers attend the regular meetings held with leaders of consumer organisations. These bodies have met on seven occasions either under my chairmanship or that of my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), the Parliamentary Secretary.

I have met the Food and Drink Federation on two occasions and the Retail Consortium on one occasion.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 7 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. Immediately after questions I shall depart the House to attend a guard of honour for the Prime Minister of Spain. I shall be having further meetings later today.

World Bank (Forest Policy)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister which Department has responsibility for instructing the United Kingdom's World Bank executive director regarding World Bank forest policy.

The Prime Minister: The Overseas Development Administration.

Oil Fires (Kuwait)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 April 1991, *Official Report*, column *1208*, if he will make a further statement on United Kingdom action in relation to oil fires in Kuwait.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy gave today to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham).

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Data Protection Registrar

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with the Data Protection Registrar as to the number of boards of governors and head teachers that are not registered under the terms of the Data Protection Act; and whether he will make a statement concerning the outcome of those discussions.

Mr. Fallon: Information is not available on registration under the Data Protection Act by boards of governors and headteachers. Officials of the Department are in discussion with the office of the Data Protection Registrar on the scope of registration by schools and guidance will be issued in the summer.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has made any estimate of the cost of registration of each school under the Data Protection Act should boards of governors, head teachers and each local education authority need to register under the Act; and whether he plans to increase grants in order to cover these costs.

Mr. Fallon: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member on 19 February 1991, at column *76*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the general items of personal information that are held in relation to individuals in list 99; if he will indicate the number of entries in list 99; whether the individual has the right to challenge the accuracy of the information held against him on list 99; whether he has had discussions with the Data Protection Registrar concerning list 99; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: List 99 contains the names, dates of birth, and departmental reference numbers of 1,540 persons who are currently wholly or partially excluded from teaching or work with children or young persons on grounds of misconduct. Before directing that any person shall be excluded, my right hon. and learned Friend offers him or her the opportunity of making representations. List 99 is outside the scope of the Data Protection Act and has not therefore been the subject of any discussion with the Data Protection Registrar.

Schools (Debt Charges)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department keeps any record of the debt charge of schools leaving local authority control.

Mr. Eggar: As the liability of an authority in respect of the principal of, or any interest on, any loan held by the authority for the purposes of a school which becomes grant maintained is not transferred to the governing body of a grant-maintained school, the Department has no need to keep a record of such debts.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice his Department gives local authorities in respect of debt charge incurred from capital investment in schools which subsequent to the investment leave local authority control; and what account is taken of any such debt charge when assessing the Department's revenue support for the local authority.

Mr. Eggar: The statutory provisions on debt charges relating to schools which become grant maintained are set out in section 74 of the Education Reform Act 1988. Those debt charges are treated in the same way as other local authority debt charges for the purpose of calculating standard spending assessments.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for financing the debt charge paid by local authorities in respect of schools which adopt grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: Authorities receive an appropriate allowance for the financing of their capital debt liabilities, including relevant liabilities relating to schools in their area that are grant maintained, within their standard spending assessments.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the debt charge to local authorities in regard to capital spend on schools which have subsequently opted out of local authority control; and if he will list the debt charge by local authority, indicating in each case the number of schools which have taken grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: As the responsibility and the financing for any debt charge attributable to a grant-maintained school remains with the former maintaining authority, the Department has no need to keep a record of the debt charges. The information requested is therefore not available.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department takes account of the debt charge on a local authority in regard to a school which adopts grant-maintained status when determining the allocation of revenue funding between the school and the local authority.

Mr. Eggar: The responsibility for meeting debt charges that relate to the period before a school is incorporated as grant-maintained remains with the school's former local authority. Authorities receive an allowance for capital financing within their standard spending assessments. A grant-maintained school's annual maintenance grant, which is recouped from its former maintaining authority, does not include provision to meet such charges.

Educational Psychological Service

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities that do not provide an educational psychological service from their retained percentage of the budget.

Mr. Fallon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 30 April 1991, at columns *141-42*.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Eggar: The information is as follows:

Name of Body	*Next appointment due, and length of appointment*	*Salary*
Business and Technician Education Council	Chairman and all 12 members in 1992 Three-year appointments	Chairman part-time £7,500 Members unpaid
Centre for information on Language Teaching and Research	Three members in 1991 Four members in 1992 Appointed for up to three years	Unpaid
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges	Six members in 1991 Four-year appointments	Unpaid
Education Assets Board	Chairman and all six members in 1992 Two-year appointments	Chairman part-time £20,310 Members unpaid
National Council for Educational Technology	New Chairman appointed on 1 April 1991 Nine members in 1991 Three[1]year appointments	Chairman part-time £6,030 Members unpaid
Council for National Academic Awards	25 members in 1991 New Chairman appointed in April 1991	Members unpaid Chairman part-time salary still under negotiation

Name of Body	*Next appointment due, and length of appointment*	*Salary*
Further Education Unit Board of Management	All 11 members in 1991 Normally three-year appointments	Unpaid
Advisory Board for the Research Councils	Two members in 1991 Two members in 1992	Members £4,000 honorarium
Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education	Eight members in 1991 10 members in 1992 Up to two-year appointments	Unpaid
Computer Board for Universities and Research Councils	Chairman and all 10 members in 1991 Chairman four-year appointment Members three-year appointments	Chairman £4,000 honorarium Members part-time daily fee £65
Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council	Chairman and Chief Executive in 1991 13 members in 1992 Three-year appointments	Chairman part-time £14,000 Members £2,100 honorarium
School Examinations and Assessment Council	Four members in 1991 Two[2] members in 1992 One, two, and three-year appointments	Unpaid
Sports Council	Chairman and 35 members in 1991 31 members in 1992 Three-year appointments	Chairman part-time £17,362 Members unpaid
United States/United Kingdom Educational Commission (Fulbright Commission)	One member in 1992 Two members in 1992 Four-year appointments	Unpaid
Universities Funding Council	Chairman and one member in 1991 New Chief Executive appointed from 1 July 1991 Nine members in 1992 Appointed for two or three years	Chairman £14,000 Members £2,120 honorarium
Agricultural and Food Research Council	Five members in 1991 Three members in 1992 Three-year appointments	£4,000 honorarium
Economic and Social Research Council	Four members in 1991 Chairman and five members in 1992 Three-year appointments although charter provides for four years	Members £4,000 honorarium Chairman £53,420
Medical Research Council	Six members in 1991 Four members in 1992 Four-year appointments	£4,000 honorarium
Natural Environment Research Council	Five members in 1991 Four members in 1992 Three-year appointments	£4,000 honorarium
National Curriculum Council	Seven members in 1991 Four members in 1992	Unpaid
Science and Engineering Research Council	Four members in 1992 Four-year appointments	£4,000 honorarium

[1] Eight new members appointed on 1 April 1991.
[2] One new member appointed on 1 April 1991.
[3] One new member appointed on 1 April 1991.

Natural Environment Research Council

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what super-computing facilities are available to the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The National Centre supercomputers available to the Natural Environment Research Council include the joint research councils' Cray XMP-48 at the Science and Engineering Research Council's Rutherford Appleton laboratory, the Cray XMP-28 at the university of London computer center and the VP1200 at the Manchester computer centre. Time on other supercomputers in the USA and at the Meteorological Office has been obtained on an ad hoc basis for collaborative research projects.

Global Climate Model

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what priority he attaches to a global climate model.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Natural Environment Research Council has given high priority to the development of global and regional models of the oceans and atmosphere. The science budget also supports a wide range of related research aimed at improving understanding of climate change processes and impacts.

Ocean Studies

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a supercomputer for Natural Environment Research Council work for ocean forecasting.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Decisions on the provision of supercomputing facilities are based upon the advice which my right hon. and learned Friend receives from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. No advice on this matter has yet been received.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what facilities he provides for world ocean calibration development.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Natural Environment Research Council James Rennell centre at the university of Southampton is actively involved with the British National Space Centre and the European Space Agency in observations designed to calibrate instruments on the European remote sensing satellite—ERS-1—which is used to study temperatures, currents and winds at the ocean surface.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to finance the work on plants in the ocean at the James Rennell centre of the Natural Environment Research Council marine atmospheric sciences unit.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Natural Environment Research Council is already supporting research at the James Rennell centre for ocean circulation at the university of Southampton, in collaboration with Princeton university in the USA and the United Kingdom climate prediction centre—the Hadley centre—in the development of mathematical models of the seasonal variation in the production of microscopic planktonic plants in the oceans, with special reference to their role in the absorption of carbon dioxide.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what requests he has received from the National Rivers Authority for more information facilities in the Western ocean.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such request.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to improve relationships with the Japanese in relation to *(a)* deep ocean technology, *(b)* the study of the micro-structure of the ocean and *(c)* global climate weather forecasting.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Working relationships are generally established at a personal level in the course of an individual scientist's work. Scientists supported by the Natural Environment Research Council maintain good relations with the Japanese in relation to both deep-ocean technology and the study of the micro-structure of the ocean. The links between the United Kingdom and Japan relating to global climate weather forecasting are primarily made through the Meteorological Office. Recently visits have been made to Japan to discuss operational meteorological and oceanographic forecasting.

In 1989, a round table meeting of senior Government scientists from Japan and the United Kingdom was held in London. Marine technology was one of the many items discussed. A further meeting will be held in Tokyo later this year.

East Birmingham Task Force

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science has met or visited the East Birmingham task force.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I visited the task force area on 21 December 1989, 23 April 1990, 3 September 1990, 30 January 1991 and 1 May 1991. I held meetings with the task force leader on 20 March 1990 and 18 March 1991 to discuss the annual action plan.

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether he has any plans to review the indexation of teachers' pensions and what action has been taken in the last six months in regard to indexation of teachers' pensions;

(2) what plans his Department has for determining future increases in teachers' pensions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: In common with other public service pensions, teachers' pensions are increased at the same time and by the same percentage as the earnings-related element of the state retirement pension. The amount of the annual uprating each April reflects the movement in the retail prices index during the 12-month period ending the previous September. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

The Pensions Increase (Review) Order 1991 announced that public service pensions would be increased from 8

April 1991. For pensions which began before 24 April 1990 the increase is 10·9 per cent. For pensions which began on or after 24 April 1990 a proportion of the full increase is paid.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Supply Failure

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of times there was a failure of water supplies in the Doncaster area during the last 12 months by *(a)* location, *(b)* reason for breakdown, and *(c)* the duration of the breakdown until supply was resumed; and what were the figures for the previous year.

Mr. Baldry: Monitoring the level of service by water companies to customers is the responsibility of the Director General of Water Services.

Phosphate Waste

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names and locations of companies that are known to discharge phosphate waste into coastal and river waters in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: The control of discharges of phosphate waste into coastal and river waters in the United Kingdom is a matter for the National Rivers Authority. The Department does not keep lists of names and locations of companies making such discharges.

Palace of Westminster

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current position on the project for cleaning the stonework of the Palace of Westminster; and if he will take action to speed up the project.

Mr. Yeo: The contract for the current stage of the programme to repair and restore the stonework, which covers the south elevation and the Victoria Tower is scheduled for completion in 1994. Before the stage is completed, plans will be drawn up and agreed with the Houses so that the next phase of the work, covering the internal courtyards, can continue without a break.

Drinking Water

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list in rank order the water companies with the highest level of purity and lowest level of contamination of the drinking water they supply.

Mr. Baldry: Because of the number and diversity of the parameters used in regulating the quality of drinking water, and also because some companies supply water from a number of different sources, it would not be possible to rank companies in the way suggested.

Rights of Way

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's current policy on showing the location of public rights of way on Forestery Commission land on its Landranger and Pathfinder maps.

Mr. Baldry: Ordnance Survey policy has not changed. All rights of way which appear on local authority definitive maps are shown on the Landranger and Pathfinder series of maps.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, in the press and public relations office of the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Trippier: The Nature Conservancy Council employed two people in its press and public relations office from 1979-80 to 1989-90. This was increased to three in 1990-91. The Nature Conservancy Council for England employs two people on this work.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Ordnance Survey.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as follows:

	Staff Complement	*Staff in Post on 1 April*
1979	7	7
1980	7	7
1981	7	7
1982	8	8
1983	6	6
1984	7	6
1985	6	6
1986	6	6
1987	6	6
1988	6	6
1989	6	6
1990	6	6
1991	6	7

Over the same period, the total number of staff employed by Ordnance Survey reduced from 3,587 to 2,482.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Trippier: The table gives the available information. No figures are available prior to 1 April 1982.

	Press and PR Staff[1]
1982-83	3
1983-84	3
1984-85	3
1985-86	3
1986-87	3
1987-88	3
1988-89	3
1989-90	5
1990-91	5
1991-92	5

[1] Staff figures are at 1 April, and staff in post equals the staff complement.

Golf Courses

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications for golf courses have been made to local planning authorities in each of the last five years; how many have been granted; how many have been refused; how many included a hotel; how many went to appeal; and, of these, how many were granted.

Mr. Yeo: Information about planning applications is not collected in a form which enables those for golf courses to be identified separately. The position on appeals involving golf courses is as follows:

Year	*Appeals received (number including hotels)*	*Appeals decided*	*Appeals granted*
1986-87	21 (2)	14	2
1987-88	12 (2)	17	6
1988-89	27 (5)	10	2
1989-90	50 (3)	37	9
[1]1990-91	95 (11)	51	17

[1] provisional

Construction Products Directive

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the regulations appertaining to the construction products directive due to be implemented on 27 June are to be published.

Mr. Yeo: The drafting of construction products regulations to implement the EC construction products directive is nearing completion. It is hoped to lay the regulations on or about 27 June.

Development Corporation Officers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to extend to cover the officers of development corporations the provisions of the Local Government Act 1988 which restrict involvement in party political affairs for those local government officers earning above a particular level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We have no plans to do so.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much in real terms, and taking account of any changes in responsibilities, the total income of local authorities increased in the first year of operation of the community charge as against the last year of the rating system; and what steps he is taking to ensure that there is no similar increase in the first year of operation of the council tax.

Mr. Key: Total demands and precepts in 1990-91, after capping, showed an increase of 15·1 per cent. in cash terms over adjusted net revenue income in 1989-90, a real terms increase of 6·7 per cent. The Government have said that they will ensure, through capping, that the substantial increase in spending which accompanied the transition to the community charge is not repeated.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that calculation of the central provision of support for local authority expenditure should, from 1992, include economic and employment factors to reflect the particular needs of localities facing above average need.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend will make known his proposals for the distribution of revenue support grant for 1992-93 in the autumn. The consultation paper about the new council tax, issued on 23 April, made it clear that the Government are not proposing any major changes to the present standard spending assessments which are based on extensive research.

Public Sector Land

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce further measures to encourage the bringing into use of vacant public sector land in the light of responses to his Department's consultation paper; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: There was widespread agreement with our proposal to give statutory backing for public sector owners' registers of their unused and underused land. Pending any longer-term decision to introduce new primary legislation to this effect, we propose now to require local authorities under section 230 of the Local Government Act 1972 to supply the Department with aggregate information about their registers. Compliance with this aspect of the 1989 code of practice has been particularly disappointing. We propose also to give local authorities clear notice that, if the provisions of the code on making such registers available to the public are not properly met this year, we intend to make regulations under section 3 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 to make these provisions to a binding requirement for 1992. My officials are writing to the local authority associations today on these points. They are also writing to other bodies about compliance with the code.

We have decided not to proceed with the other main proposals in the consultation paper for directing disposals to named persons and for experimental local franchises of packages of sites. Strong objections were raised against these possibilities during consultation.

There was general recognition of the desirability of further action to bring vacant public sector land into use. Existing measures include derelict land grant, follow-up of the Audit Commission's report on local authorities' property management and directions to dispose of land entered on my right hon. Friend's register. For their part, Government Departments and other bodies face pressure to dispose of vacant land in their possession through the annual public expenditure survey and related discussions. My right hon. Friend is considering what further measures might be appropriate and our conclusions will be announced in due course.

Aggregates

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the long-term forecast of demand for aggregates.

Mr. Yeo: New forecasts of the demand for aggregates for the next 20 years have been prepared by independent consultants. These have been published today. They are not Government plans or targets to be met.

The forecasts are based on the longer-term prospects for construction investment and indicate a rising trend in demand for betweeen 421 million tonnes per annum and 490 million tonnes per annum by 2001—about 4 per cent. a year.

The Government are publishing the forecasts now so that the environmental implications of the rising demand for aggregates can be fully considered. These are a matter for serious concern. The forecasts do not mean that the demand must be met from new sources of land-won aggregates. Nor do they mean that targets are set for production by the minerals industry.

Aggregates are needed to meet the demand for improvements to transport infrastructure, house building, improvements in water quality and hospitals. The Government are currently revising the present guidelines for aggregates provision in England and Wales which were published in mineral planning guidance note No. 6—MPG6—in March 1989.

The Government recognise that the mining of aggregates is a matter of considerable public concern and that there is a widespread view that the industry's operations lack sufficient regard for the environment. Before new guidelines are published the Government will wish to hear from the industry what practical steps they intend to take to improve their environmental performance and their standing with the public.

The Government will expect the industry to make greater use of alternative sources of supply. These include the potential from marine dredged sand and gravel; the greater use of materials such as china clay, sand and colliery minestone; and the increased exploitation of waste and recycled materials including power station ash, blast furnace slag and crushed concrete. We shall also consider the contributions that can be made from coastal super quarries. The Government have research in hand to examine all these options.

The publication of the forecasts will enable the Government to consider the view of local authorities, the industry and the general public about the future demand for aggregates, before publishing draft guidelines for public consultation.

The Government will consider whether the present policy of ensuring a steady supply for the construction industry remains appropriate and whether it encourages efficiency in aggregates use. The regional aggregates working parties have been asked to consider the medium and long-term implications of the forecasts on their regions.

While the forecasts provide general background information about trends in demand, their use in relation to the consideration of a particular application on development plan is necessarily limited until the revised guidelines are published. MPG6 remains the Government's policy for aggregates provision until it is revised. Mineral planning authorities should have regard to the statement made by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) in July 1989 which made it clear that MPG6 should be implemented as a matter of priority.

Interest Rate Swaps

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement in the light of the House of Lords' judgment on local authority interest rate swaps.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to his answer, 24 January 1991, columns 275-76]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have given careful consideration to the implications of this judgment. The Government have received a number of representations favouring a variety of different schemes of legislation to enable local authorities to make payments under past arrangements which have been found to be unlawful. The Government have concluded, however, that it is best not to seek to alter the existing legal obligations of the parties to these arrangements.

As the Government have already made clear, there is specific legislation enabling local authorities to borrow money and protecting those who lend to local authorities. This legislation was not in issue in the recent litigation on interest rate swaps.

Merseyside (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the recent visit of the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to Merseyside;

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent meeting of the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside concerning extra funding for Liverpool city council.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* I met the honourable Members for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) and for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) on 17 April to discuss additional financial assistance for Liverpool city council. I reminded them of a range of Government programmes which are benefiting Liverpool, such as the urban programme, estate action, the city action team, the Merseyside development corporation and the Granby/Toxteth task force. I explained that we were not prepared to help the council resolve problems arising from its spending programmes of the mid-80s which were in opposition to Government policies. We are however keen to encourage the council to participate fully in our initiatives for inner-city regeneration and to benefit from the additional resources that come with them.

I took the opportunity to emphasise these points when I visited Liverpool on 26 April and had discussions with the city council. I impressed on the council the need for a constructive approach to working in partnership with the Government, the private sector and other agencies. I also visited Cable Communications Ltd. in Brunswick business park, where I saw the company's operations to deliver cable television to the region.

London Docklands

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people from the unemployment registers in the London boroughs of Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Newham have secured employment in new businesses in the London Docklands UDA.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Food Aid (Africa)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much food aid has been contributed by Her Majesty's Government to meet the food aid needs in Africa; and what have been the bilateral donations from EC member states, the United States and other bilateral donors.

Mrs. Chalker: Since September 1990 Britain has committed 158,000 tonnes of food aid to Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique, Angola and Malawi. The United States of America and European Community, the largest donors, have so far pledged 815,000 tonnes and 685,000 tonnes respectively to these same countries. On 2 May the European Community agreed to provide a further 400,000 tonnes for Africa as a whole. Full details of individual contributions made by other donors are not yet available on the same basis.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give his assessment of food aid needs to meet the current famines in Africa; and what are the comparable figures produced by the European Commission and the World Food Programme.

Mrs. Chalker: The European Commission's most recent assessment suggests a total emergency food aid requirement of some 4·5 million tonnes for the whole of 1991 based on an estimated 31 million people affected in 12 countries in Africa. According to the Commission this estimate has been checked with the FAO, the World Food Programme, Canada and the United States of America. We agree broadly with it.

Kurdish Refugees

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the availability of Harir airport for use to transport supplies to the Kurdish refugees.

Mrs. Chalker: Although we understand that Harir may be serviceable, I am not aware of any plans to use it at present.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: The number of press and public relations posts in the Overseas Development Administration has been 12 from 1979-80 to the present. All posts were occupied on 1 April each year, except in 1983 when there was one vacancy.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the capacity of the joint relief partnership to meet the needs of the people of Wollo and Gonder for emergency assistance; and whether the British Government will provide financial help to the Ethiopian relief organisation to implement its programme of internal purchase to allow Ethiopians in these areas to feed themselves.

Mrs. Chalker: The joint relief partnership, using the southern line, should be able to meet substantially the emergency needs of the people of Wollo and Gondar. This will depend however on continued supplies of food arriving at Assab and on securing conditions allowing the southern line to be kept open. We are providing assistance through the southern line. We have no plans at present to finance internal purchase arrangements.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the provision of aid for the Wollo and Gondar regions of Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The emergency needs of the people of Wollo and Gondar should be able to be met substantially through the operations of the joint relief partnership, using the southern line. This will depend however on continued supplies of food arriving at Assab and on security conditions allowing the southern line to be kept open. We are providing assistance through the southern line.

Vietnam

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to give Vietnam financial assistance to help pay arrears owed to the IMF.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom strongly supports the internationally agreed strategy for assisting developing countries with their arrears to the IMF and World bank, demonstrated by our active role in clearing Guyana's and Zambia's arrears. We have no direct bilateral aid programme with Vietnam and hence at present are not in a position to offer a financial contribution in the context of the settlement of Vietnam's arrears. We are keeping the position under review.

African Countries

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what quantity of seeds the ODA has supplied or has plans to supply to *(a)* Sudan, *(b)* Ethiopia and *(c)* other African countries facing famine; when the seeds are expected to arrive; and when they will be distributed to farmers.

Mrs. Chalker: In response to the famine in Africa the ODA has funded supplies of seeds, at a total cost of over £2·505 million, as follows:

(a) Sudan

630 tonnes millet through SCF for May 1991 planting (£490,000.)

£510,000 through CARE towards cost of mixed grains for May 1991 planting.

£125,000 through ACORD towards cost of mixed grains for May 1991 planting.

(b) Ethiopia
No seed supplied recently, but we are willing to look sympathetically at requests as a famine relief measure.

(c) Other African countries affected by famine:

Angola
13 tonnes white maize sent through CAFOD to arrive September 1990—£13,700.
300 tonnes millet and sorghum sent through Christian Aid to arrive September 1990—£177,700.
£17,000 through CAFOD towards cost of 4 tonnes vegetable seeds sent to arrive October-November 1990.
£25,000 through OXFAM towards cost of 100 tonnes sorghum to arrive March-April 1991.
Visits by CAFOD and Christian Aid are now in progress to report on distribution and use of seed.

Liberia
US$50,000 through UNDRO for vegetable and rice seeds for mid-1991 planting.

Malawi
£45,950 through World Vision towards cost of vegetable/grain seeds for mid-1991 planting.

20*Mozambique*
£439,000 through NGOs towards costs of seeds for planting April 1991.
£634,000 through NGOs towards costs of 2,447 tonnes vegetable/grain seeds for planting October 1991.

Brazil

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to increase the provision of aid to the indigenous peoples of Brazil; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are already financing a health project for the Yanomami Indians through Oxfam. We are currently discussing with the Brazilian authorities the possibility of providing further help for indigenous people and I will be very happy to do so from within our bilateral programme for Brazil if suitable activities can be identified. Support has also been made available under the joint funding scheme to British non-governmental organisations undertaking development projects in Brazil and, subject to the availability of resources, new proposals from non-governmental organisations will be considered.

Glendon Hospital, Montserrat

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when it is expected that the roofless part of Glendon hospital in Montserrat, which was damaged by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, will be repaired; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Glendon hospital is functioning normally albeit with less space available because the roofless part is not currently in use. Work on rehabilitation and redevelopment, including construction of a new roof, will go ahead as soon as the accommodation required to house the hospital temporarily is ready to be occupied.

Iraqi Refugees

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements his Department will make to send out to the Iraqi refugees relief goods donated by the public.

Mrs. Chalker: We have already helped voluntary bodies, including British Aid for the Kurds, with the costs of transport of relief supplies generously donated by the public. We have now reached an agreement with CARE Britain under which they are responding to requests for assistance from voluntary bodies by screening and collecting priority relief items. The ODA will then take responsibility for their onward transport. Voluntary bodies interested in this arrangement should contact the ODA's disaster unit first.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Political Union

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is in possession of the draft treaty on European political union; and when he expects that copies will be available for hon. Members.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes. I understand the Library is taking steps to obtain a copy.

This text does not have any formal standing. As a negotiating document, it may quickly become out of date. I do not intend to make it formally available to the House. There will, however, be ample opportunity for hon. Members to debate the issues with which it deals, for example during the regular EC debate in the run-up to the next European Council in June.

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the draft treaty on political union submitted by the Luxembourg presidency on 15 April.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The document is in the public domain. I understand that the Library is taking steps to obtain a copy.

Khmer Rouge

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many letters he has received from *(a)* the Khmer Rouge and *(b)* Pol Pot, by year for the last four years to date; and if he will make a statement on their contents and his replies.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on 26 July 1990, at column *475*. Apart from these, no other letters from the Khmer Rouge, or Pol Pot, have been addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Iran

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has had about the number of executions which have taken place in Iran in the last 12 months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to receive reports from various sources of large numbers of executions in Iran. We have on many occasions expressed our concern about allegations of human rights abuses there, in particular the large numbers of executions.

East Germany

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foriegn and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost of bringing the agriculture of the former East Germany into the European Community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The European Commission has estimated the additional cost to the Community agriculture budget in a full year resulting from German unification at 1,414 mecu or £985 million. A total of 1,315 mecu- £916 million - has been provided in the 1991 Community budget for this purpose, which represents slightly less than a full year's cost.

British Consulate, Patras

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foriegn and Commonwealth Affairs what report he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Athens about the public speech by the Greek Minister of Public Order on 27 April regarding an alleged Palestinian terrorist threat to the British consulate in Patras; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was informed of the Greek Minister of Public Affairs' speech on the day it was made. Her Majesty's embassy in Athens is in close touch with the Greek authorities. Her Majesty's representatives in Greece take any terrorist threat to British interests very seriously. They have taken suitable security measures, including the temporary closure of all British consulates and vice-consulates in Greece outside Athens.

United Nations Children's Rights Convention

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs further to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), *Official Report*, 26 April 1991, column 598, when he expects to conclude his consultation with the United Nations islands and dependent territories on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are continuing our consultations with the dependent territories and the United Kingdom islands. We shall ratify the convention on the rights of the child as soon as possible.

Kurdish Refugees

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foriegn and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made any representations to the Government of Turkey concerning their refusal to grant refugee status to Iraqi Kurds.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Turkish authorities have allowed Iraqi displaced persons to come down from the mountains to more accessible areas inside Turkey where immediate relief aid can be provided. The Turkish Government share the longer-term objective of the relief effort to ensure that they can eventually return to their own homes in Iraq in peace and security.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made any representations to the Turkish Government concerning the placement of Kurdish refugee camps in Turkey under United Nations supervision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No representations have been made to the Turkish Government regarding the supervision of camps in Turkey for Iraqi displaced persons: these camps are at present under the control of the Turkish authorities. They are not administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on violations of article 1 of the Geneva convention 1951 and the 1967 protocol on refugees by the Turkish Government in their dealings with refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have received no reports of any violations of article 1 of the 1951 Geneva convention or the 1967 protocol on refugees by the Turkish Government.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

South Africa (Sanctions)

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the economic sanctions against South Africa, including the withdrawal of export credit and trade promotion facilities which would otherwise be available, still being enforced by *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* other Governments of the European Community.

Mr. Sainsbury: The economic sanctions applied by Her Majesty's Government are included in the list of sanctions set out in annex C of appendix 2 to volume II of the Foreign Affairs Committee report, "UK Policy towards South Africa and other States of the Region", 14 February 1991, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Since that report was submitted, EC Foreign Ministers have agreed in principle to lift the measures imposed in September 1986. The Government have also notified the Commonwealth of their intention to lift the ban on Government funding of trade missions to, and participation in trade fairs and exhibitions in, South Africa.

Other EC countries are known to apply additional economic sanctions against South Africa at national level, but details are not available.

Chancery Group

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) who is responsible for making an announcement, and at what time he expects it to be made, concerning the safety and security of money placed by investors with the Chancery Group;

(2) what information he has on the current position of the Chancery Group, and the safety of investors' money.

Mr. Redwood: I understand that the administrator, Price Waterhouse should be able to help the hon. Member on these points.

Bankruptcy Protection

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will bring forward proposals to establish a system of bankruptcy protection similar to chapter 11 used by firms in the United States of America to reorganise their finances without liquidation.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans at present to do so.

Receives (Charges)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will bring forward proposals to require receivers put in by banks to provide the firms they are put into with a breakdown and explanation of their charges.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans at present to do so.

Bankruptcy Court

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will bring forward proposals to establish a bankruptcy court on the lines suggested by Sir Kenneth Cork.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans at present to do so.

Insolvency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations have been made to him about the case for reform of insolvency procedures.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I have received various approaches about aspects of insolvency policy. The working of the Insolvency Act 1986 is kept under review by the insolvency service executive agency.

Waste Paper Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the monthly value and quantity of imports of waste paper from Germany for 1988 to the latest available month.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information requested is as follows:

Imports of waste paper (SITC 251.1) from Germany

Month	Year 1988 Tonnes	1988 Value pound	1989 Tonnes	1989 Value pound	1990 Tonnes	1990 Value pound	1991 Tonnes	1991 Value pound
January	312	36,034	263	31,402	51	14,638	184	42,476
February	539	75,467	152	18,489	234	38,476	67	8,910
March	454	45,837	161	20,305	251	42,013	—	—
April	317	37,834	67	8,549	138	19,033	—	—
May	1,610	128,857	283	32,253	1,256	83,393	—	—
June	1,326	99,246	1,175	90,489	119	18,371	—	—
July	1,218	89,843	144	23,759	1,429	76,094	—	—
August	1,227	132,311	1,215	104,930	184	28,197	—	—
September	158	21,421	2,047	162,178	1,035	57,620	—	—
October	2,266	225,905	1,096	109,706	1,050	65,416	—	—
November	927	76,985	156	33,232	585	93,686	—	—
December	133	16,791	1,004	94,088	97	12,532	—	—

Source: British Paper and Board Industry Federation.
(based on Customs and Excise figures).

Notes:
1. From January 1991 the figures are for United Germany.
Earlier figures are for the Federal Republic of Germany.
2. Imports are on a country of consignment basis.
The country from which the goods are consigned is not necessarily the country of shipment, origin or manufacture.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant post in the press and public relations office of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information is available only for the years 1984 to 1991 inclusive, and is as follows:

ECGD—Press and Public Relations Branch

	Full complement including vacant posts	*Staff employment*
1 April 1984	6	6
1 April 1985	6	6
1 April 1986	6	6
1 April 1987	6	5
1 April 1988	7	7
1 April 1989	7	6
1 April 1990	7	7
1 April 1991	7	7

Business Statistics

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses *(a)* began trading and *(b)* went into receivership in each of the last 10 years in (i) Suffolk and Norfolk, (ii) England and (iii) the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: Information is not readily available in the form requested. The following table gives estimates of the number of companies whose registered offices are in the areas shown:

	Norfolk and Suffolk	England and Wales	Great Britain
Companies incorporated in financial year 1990-91	1,200	108,700	113,700
Active companies on register at 31 March 1991	16,900	978,300	1,030,200
Of which: In receivership	168	8,430	9,120

It should be noted that the location of companies in receivership may depend on the location of the offices which carry out receivership duties and that companies can be in receivership for a number of years.

The number of companies which were incorporated and which went into receivership during the last 10 years is as follows (data for Norfolk and Suffolk are not available):

Year	England and Wales		Great Britain	
	Incorporations (000s)	Receiverships (000s)	Incorporations (000s)	Receiverships (000s)
1981	68·9	1·3	72·4	1·7
1982	83·0	2·7	87·2	2·9
1983	91·5	2·8	96·2	3·1
1984	92·9	2·2	97·9	2·3
1985	99·2	1·9	104·6	2·1
1986	111·3	1·9	117·3	2·1
1987	122·1	1·3	128·0	1·5
1988	122·1	1·1	128·9	1·2
1989	123·5	1·7	130.3	1·8
1990	113·9	4·3	120·9	4·4

Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his written answer of 1 May, if all of the bidders have tabled an offer to pay for the acquisition of Export Credits Guarantee Department's Insurance Services Group in Cardiff.

Mr. Sainsbury: Both NCM and Assicurazioni Generali have tabled an offer to pay for the acquisition of the short-term business of ECGD, subject to contract. Trade Indemnity has submitted an alternative proposal. Each response is now being evaluated by the Government and their advisers.

EC Regional Funds

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give figures for the total amount of assistance received from EC regional funds to each standard planning region of the United Kingdom since the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Community.

Mr. Leigh: The information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Bankruptcies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of bankruptcies and liquidations categorised by size in each month of 1989, 1990 and 1991 to date; and in how many cases banks put in receivers.

Mr. Redwood: Statistics on the number of bankruptcies and company insolvencies are maintained quarterly and are not categorised by size. Administrative receivers are appointed under powers given in debentures by debenture holders, the vast majority of whom are banks. Statistics are maintained on a quarterly basis showing the number of receivers appointed by debenture holders, but are not held of the proportion of such appointments made by banks.

Quarterly figures for the period requested are as follows:

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Bankruptcies					
1989	1,972	2,103	1,837	2,226	8,138
1990	2,514	2,804	3,018	3,722	12,058
1991	[1]4,835	—	—	—	—
Company insolvencies:					
Compulsory liquidations					
1989	854	1,103	548	1,515	4,020
1990	1,267	1,286	985	2,439	5,977
1991	[1]2,076	—	—	—	—
Creditors voluntary liquidations					
1989	1,712	1,711	1,479	1,533	6,435
1990	2,060	2,070	2,316	2,628	9,074
1991	[2]	—	—	—	—
Receiverships					
1989	358	477	324	547	1,706
1990	918	925	1,045	1,430	4,318
1991	[2]—	—	—	—	—

[1] Provisional.
[2] Not yet available.

COCOM Talks

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the COCOM talks on exports to eastern Europe.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* Subject to the satisfactory resolution of some outstanding issues on telecommunications and computers during the next two weeks, discussions on a major revision of COCOM's industrial list, which commenced in autumn 1990, are scheduled to be concluded at a COCOM high-level meeting on 23 and 24 May 1991. The current industrial list, comprising 80 separate items, will then be reduced to a core list of 10 categories covering only the most strategic and sensitive goods and technologies.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the total amounts paid by central Government as rates rebates, community charge rebates

and transitional relief for every year since 1975, including an estimate for 1990-91 and 1991-92, in cash and real terms and as a proportion of total local government spending.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Figures for transitional relief, community charge reduction and total local government spending since 1 April 1989 are provided in the table. Rates rebates and community charge rebates are a matter for the Department of Social Security.

Local government spending[1]

	Cash	*Real Terms (1991-92 prices)*
	£ million	*£ million*
1989-90	4,728	5,451
1990-91	5,179	5,541
1991-92	5,666	5,666

[1] Figures are of total current expenditure financed by grants, community charge, non-domestic rate income and balances. The 1989-90 figure is the final outturn. The 1990-91 figure is the provisional outturn. The 1991-92 figure is the budget estimate.

Transitional relief/community charge reduction[1]

	Cash	*Real Terms (1991-92 prices)*	*Percentage of Local government spending*
	£ million	*£ million*	
1989-90	7·9	9·1	0·2
1990-91	63·0	63·0	1·2
1991-92	43·0	43·0	0·7

[1] In Scotland the transitional relief scheme has been replaced, with backdated effect to 1 April 1990, by the personal community charge reduction scheme. The 1989-90 figure shows payments to date and may be subject to variation. The 1990-91 figure is an estimate of expenditure on the reduction scheme and updates expenditure already made on transitional relief. The 1991-92 figure is an estimate which takes account of the £140 general reduction in charges.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take in the light of local authorities' budgets for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Local authorities in Scotland have budgeted to increase their expenditure this year by £420 million or 9·4 per cent. over the provisional outturn figures for last year. Overall authorities plan to spend £119 million or 2·5 per cent. in excess of the 1991-92 grant-aided expenditure—GAE—figures.

While this represents an improvement on the position last year when the average excess over GAE was 4·6 per cent., I remain concerned about the burden facing local taxpayers in certain areas as a result of the spending plans of the authorities concerned. Among the regional councils—which, of course, account for the bulk of local government expenditure in Scotland—the authority planning by far the most substantial spending excess—12·18 per cent. above GAE—is Lothian. I have accordingly decided to initiate action in terms of schedule 3 to the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 in respect of that authority, on the grounds that its planned expenditure for 1991-92 is excessive and unreasonable. A letter has today been sent to the council proposing a reduction of £50—that is, from £310 to £260—in its personal community charge for this year—the equivalent of a reduction in its planned expenditure of £25 million. The letter invites the council to make representations.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the proportion of total local government spending financed by *(a)* the rates/community charge, *(b)* non-domestic rates, *(c)* Government grants and *(d)* rents and local charges in Scotland in each year since 1974.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The percentages of total local government income from each source to finance rate fund services is shown in the table. Figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 are not yet available. Figures exclude transactions on housing revenue accounts. Total local government income shows slight differences from total local government expenditure because of the use of balances in financing expenditure.

Rate fund services Revenue income[1]

	Domestic rates[2,3]	*Non-domestic rates*[2,3]	*Government grants*	*Rents, local charges and other income*[4]	*Total income*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
1974-75	11	14	60	15	100
1975-76	14	19	62	5	100
1976-77	12	18	64	6	100
1977-78	13	19	62	7	100
1978-79	10	21	61	8	100
1979-80	10	21	60	8	100
1980-81	11	23	59	7	100
1981-82	12	26	55	7	100
1982-83	13	27	53	7	100
1984-84	11	26	56	8	100
1984-85	11	26	55	8	100
1985-86	12	27	53	8	100
1986-87	12	28	51	8	100
1987-88	13	29	51	7	100
1988-89	14	27	51	8	100

[1] Totals may not be exactly equal to the sum of their constituent parts due to rounding.
[2] Excluding rate rebates and domestic element of rate support grant. Includes net cost of collection of rates.
[3] The breakdown of rate income into domestic and non-domestic rate income is estimated pro-rata to rateable values.
[4] Includes rents, sales, fees and charges.

Source: Scottish Local Government Financial Statistics (various years).

Local Tax Exemplification

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any information was available to his Department in his recent local tax exemplification on market values of residential property in each local authority area in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Yes. Estimates of the distribution of the housing stock by capital value in each local authority area were provided to the Scottish Office by the Inland Revenue Valuation Office.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he arrived in his recent local tax exemplifications for Scotland at *(a)* the total valuation of the Scottish housing stock, *(b)* the total valuation of the public sector stock, *(c)* the total valuation of the private sector stock and *(d)* the distribution of properties in each proposed band in each local authority area in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The estimates were based on information provided by the Inland Revenue Valuation Office on the distribution by capital value of the housing stock in each local authority area. This information does not separately distinguish public and private sector stock.

Community Charge

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the estimated local income tax rates required to replace the gross income, including rebates, raised from the community charge in each region and district authority on the basis of planned expenditure in 1991-92; what those rates are net of rebates; and what those rates are equalised and unequalised.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Approximate rates of local income tax required to replace the budgeted income from the community charge in 1991-92, including rebates and after receipt of community charge grant, are given in the table. The calculations assume resources equalisation—that the yield of 1p in the pound is the same per adult in all areas. It is not possible to calculate equivalent figures net of rebates, nor on the basis of an unequalised local income tax base.

Note:

The local income tax rate for Scotland has been estimated for 1991-92 by dividing the total amount to be raised from the community charge, net of community charge grant, by an estimate of the yield of 1p in the pound on the basis rate of income tax for Scotland. Income from the community water charge is not included.

Local Income Tax Rate

	Pence in pound
Borders	3·1
Berwickshire	0·2
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0·6
Roxburgh	0·5
Tweeddale	0·4
Central	4·5
Clackmannan	2·1
Falkirk	0·5
Stirling	2·0
Dumfries and Galloway	3·4
Annandale and Eskdale	1·0
Nithsdale	1·0
Stewartry	0·5
Wigtown	0·9
Fife	5·0
Dunfermline	1·2
Kirkcaldy	1·2
North East Fife	1·4
Grampian	3·3
Aberdeen city	2·1
Banff and Buchan	1·0
Gordon	0·6
Kincardine and Deeside	0·1
Moray	0·4
Highland	3·5
Badenoch and Strathspey	0·3
Caithness	0·1
Inverness	0·1
Lochaber	0·9
Nairn	0·2
Ross and Cromarty	0·8
Skye and Lochalsh	0·4
Sutherland	0·5
Lothian	7·2
East Lothian	1·5
Edinburgh City	2·5
Midlothian	1·3
West Lothian	0·8
Strathclyde	4·0
Argyll and Bute	1·8
Bearsden and Milngavie	1·4
Clydebank	2·3
Clydesdale	1·7
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0·9
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1·0
Cunninghame	1·9
Dumbarton	2·8
East Kilbride	2·1
Eastwood	0·5
Glasgow City	2·0
Hamilton	1·8
Inverclyde	1·4
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	1·2
Kyle and Carrick	2·2
Monklands	1·8
Motherwell	1·3
Renfrew	2·1
Strathkelvin	1·9
Tayside	4·7
Angus	0·7
Dundee City	1·9
Perth and Kinross	0·9
Islands	
Orkney	0·1
Shetland	—
Western Isles	0·7

Capital Valuation (Domestic Properties)

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department used any building society information in reaching its conclusions on the capital valuation of domestic properties in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No.

Community Charge Reduction Scheme

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money his Department has made available for the operation of the community charge reduction scheme in Scotland in 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: A sum of £43 million has been made available to cover payments to charge payers under the community charge reduction scheme in respect of the 1991-92 financial year. The Government have also undertaken to meet reasonable costs incurred by local authorities in administering the scheme.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long on average it takes for each department of the Scottish Office to pay contractors and suppliers from receipt of invoices; and what representations he has received on this matter during the last five years.

Mr. Lang: In making payments to contractors and suppliers, all my departments observe the guidance in "Government Accounting". This means that, once liability to pay has matured, payments are made in accordance with the terms and conditions of payment as specified in contracts or purchase orders or, in the absence of such contractual arrangements, within 30 days of receipt. Generally, it is our practice to make payments as early as possible in line with the Government's support of the "prompt payment" initiative.

In the last five years, three representations have been received on this issue. One arose from a dispute over the goods supplied; the second was the result of incorrectly addressed correspondence; and the third was directed to the department in error.

Strathclyde Fire Service

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the figures for call-outs to actual fires for Strathclyde fire service for the last available quarter for *(a)* the whole of Strathclyde fire service, *(b)* each division of Strathclyde fire service and *(c)* each station within Strathclyde fire service;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the call-out figures for Strathclyde fire service for the last available quarter for *(a)* the whole of Strathclyde fire service, *(b)* each division of Strathclyde fire service and *(c)* each station within Strathclyde fire service;

(3) if he will publish a table quantifying the mobilising time from all fire stations in Strathclyde fire service and the attendance time for all fire stations in Strathclyde fire service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The complement of staff in the public information division of the Forestry Commission is given in the table. Before 1982, the division was responsible for preparing exhibitions for shows, but this work was then delegated to local offices, leading to the reduction of four posts. No posts are recorded as being vacant on 1 April in any year.

Year	*Complement*
1980	12
1981	12
1982	8
1983	9
1984	9
1985	10
1986	13
1987	12
1988	11
1989	13
1990	13
1991	14

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Scottish Development Agency.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Crime, Strathclyde

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the percentage change in the number of recorded crimes in X division of Strathclyde police for each year since 1980 and for each category of crime.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is given in the following table:

Number of crimes and offences recorded by the police and percentage change for each year since 1980
X division, Strathclyde region police authority

	Number of recorded crimes and offences										
	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Total crimes and offences	16,769	16,907	16,658	16,135	15,224	15,176	15,932	15,856	15,671	18,572	19,022
Total crimes	7,217	8,007	8,150	7,579	6,765	7,201	7,825	7,897	7,568	7,993	7,680
Group 1 Non-sexual crimes of violence	203	213	261	261	286	324	259	278	314	287	242
Group 2 Crimes of indecency	82	89	70	47	76	77	64	72	62	50	31
Group 3 Crimes of dishonesty	4,532	5,460	5,629	5,157	4,486	4,866	5,310	5,476	5,157	5,469	5,435
Group 4 Fire-raising, vandalism, etc.	2,185	2,094	1,937	1,736	1,548	1,603	1,908	1,756	1,690	1,704	1,513
Group 5 Other crimes	215	151	253	378	369	331	284	315	345	483	459
Total offences	9,552	8,900	8,508	8,556	8,459	7,975	8,107	7,959	8,103	10,579	11,342

Number of recorded crimes and offences

		1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Group 6	Miscellaneous offences	4,516	4,155	4,067	3,997	3,980	3,824	3,285	3,415	3,073	3,098	3,049
Group 7	Motor vehicle offences	5,036	4,745	4,441	4,559	4,479	4,151	4,822	4,544	5,030	7,481	8,293

Annual percentage change

		1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Total crimes and offences		—	1	−1	−3	−6	0	5	0	−1	19	2
Total crimes		—	11	2	−7	−11	6	9	1	−4	6	−4
Group 1	Non-sexual crimes of violence	—	5	23	0	10	13	−20	7	13	−9	−16
Group 2	Crimes of indecency	—	9	−21	−33	62	1	−17	13	−14	−19	−38
Group 3	Crimes of dishonesty	—	20	3	−8	−13	8	9	3	−6	6	−1
Group 4	Fire-raising, vandalism, etc.	—	−4	−7	−10	−11	4	19	−8	−4	1	−11
Group 5	Other crimes	—	−30	68	49	−2	−10	−14	11	10	40	−5
Total offences		—	−7	−4	1	−1	−6	2	−2	2	31	7
Group 6	Miscellaneous offences	—	−8	−2	−2	0	−4	−14	4	−10	1	−2
Group 7	Motor vehicle offences	—	−6	−6	3	−2	−7	16	−6	11	49	11

Source: Reports to the chief constable of Strathclyde.

Health Service

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the appropriate figure for the annual uprating for inflation in relation to Scottish health service costs for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No such index is maintained. Detailed information of the costs of hospital and community health and family services is published annually in "Scottish Health Service Costs".

Ravenscraig and Clydesdale Steelworks

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has anything to add to his reply of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *338*, concerning the information he received from the European Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, relating to the statements made by Sir Robert Scholey to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry concerning the attitude of the Commission to a possible sale of Ravenscraig and Clydesdale steelworks.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have nothing to add to the reply which I gave the hon. Member on 22 April.

War Crimes

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what investigation the Lord Advocate has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of Germans in Berlin in 1945 by Russian soldiers;

(2) what investigations the Lord Advocate has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of partisans in southern France in 1945;

(3) what investigation the Lord Advocate has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the massacre of the Russian officer corps or any of those murdered in Stalin's purges;

(4) what investigation the Lord Advocate has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the massacre of Polish officers at Katyn;

(5) what investigation the Lord Advocate has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of Cossacks in Yugoslavia, Russia and Austria in 1945;

(6) what investigation the Lord Advocate has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of Poles in the Warsaw uprising in 1944.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: So far as the Government are aware, no allegations have been made that persons resident in this country participated in any of these murders.

Planning Procedures

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement of his consideration of the appeal by East Lothian district council against the decision of Lothian regional council to call in the planning consent for the restoration of Archerfield house and the development of the surrounding estate.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* I am considering this appeal case and will issue my decision shortly. I shall send the hon. Member a copy of the decision letter.

Management Consultants (Fees)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total sum paid out in fees by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers that my predecessor gave him on 13 March 1990 at column *114* and 13 March 1989 at column *35*. Additional information is as follows:

	£
[1]1989-90	374,620
[1]1990-91	807,343
[2]1991-92	664,139

[1] Outturn
[2] Estimated figure

HEALTH

Breast Care Nurses

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many breast care nurses appear on the national register of breast care nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department does not hold a register of breast care nurses.

Health Systems (Employment)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the total number of persons employed in *(a)* private health systems, *(b)* NHS or equivalent and *(c)* the overall total in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Germany and (iii) France;

(2) if he will list the number of nurses employed in *(a)* private health systems, *(b)* the national health service or equivalent and *(c)* the overall totals in (i) the United Kingdom with those employed, (ii) Germany and (iii) France.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The available information for England is given in the table. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland. Information regarding Germany and France is not collected by this Department. My hon. Friend may wish to approach the embassies concerned for details.

Total staff and nursing and midwifery staff employed in NHS and private sector—England: 1989[1]

	Number	*WTE*
Nursing and midwifery staff:		
National health service[2]	486,700	405,300
Private health systems[3,4]	109,500	78,500
Total staff:		
National health service[5]	970,900	796,600

Source: Department of Health (SMI3) Censuses of medical and non-medical manpower and (SMI2) KO36 return.

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest hundred (100).

[2] Includes agency staff, qualified nurses and midwives, learners and unqualified staff.

[3] The only data collected centrally on private sector staff relates to private hospitals, homes and clinics registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984.

[4] "Whole time equivalent" relates to the contracted hours of employment in the individual establishments and does not equate to the 37·5 hour standard week worked by NHS nursing staff.

[5] Includes staff at the Dental Estimates Board, Prescription Pricing Authority, London Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities and Family Practitioner Committees and other statutory authorities, agency staff, permanent paid and honorary staff and locums.

Chainsaw Accidents

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the number and nature of non-work accidents through the use of chainsaws over each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people claiming exemption from prescription charges were *(a)* investigated and *(b)* prosecuted in the last 12 months of which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In 1989, a total of 52,968 claims for exemption from prescription charges were referred for investigation. The decision to prosecute in any individual case is the responsibility of the family health services authority and such information is not available centrally.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what general assurances on financial solvency he seeks when considering applications to establish hospital trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Financial viability is one of the criteria considered when deciding whether to establish a unit as a trust. The unit's management has to have a clear perception of the financial challenges facing it and the plans and ability to deal with them.

Louth County Hospital

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the capital expenditure on Louth county hospital in Lincolnshire since April 1979 and since April 1975.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority, for details.

Sign Language Interpreters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities that provide British sign language interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing patients; and which make a charge for the service.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Walsall NHS Trust

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future funding of Walsall NHS trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Walsall hospitals' national health service trust, like all other trusts and directly managed units, obtains its income from contracts to provide health services to health authorities which purchase such services on behalf of their residents. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. M. Foden, the chairman of the trust, for details.

Disaster Counselling

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received the report of the working party on disaster follow-up and counselling; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received a copy of the report of the independent working party on disaster follow-up and counselling, which was published today and which is entitled "Disasters: Planning for A Caring Response". Copies are available in the Library.

The Government will be studying the report carefully and will welcome the views of interested organisations.

Air Pollution

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any recommendations have been made by the advisory group on the medical aspects of air pollution episodes about the advice that should be given to the public during periods of high ozone concentrations.

Mr. Dorrell: The advisory group has recently completed a detailed report on ozone and its effects on health and this will be published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office as soon as possible. The executive summary of the report is published today and copies have been placed in the Library. Copies of the summary are available to the public from the Department.

The main conclusion of the group is that the ozone levels experienced in the United Kingdom during hot summer weather are unlikely to produce any permanent lung damage and general warnings to the public are not justified. However, during periods of high ozone concentration some individuals sensitive to ozone may experience respiratory symptoms while taking vigorous exercise out of doors, and these symptoms may be more troublesome in those with some impairment of lung function. The group has recommended that advice should be made available so that individuals who are particularly sensitive to ozone can take steps to reduce exposure.

The group's recommendations have been accepted by Government and will be implemented immediately. Information and advice about ozone levels and their effects and how to minimise exposure to ozone is available on the air quality help line set up by the Department of the Environment and the Meteorological Office. The Chief Medical Officer has written to all doctors setting out the report's main conclusions.

Pregnancy Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures for 1989-90 of the number of clinics in England offering *(a)* IVF, GIFT and other procedures and *(b)* GIFT and other procedures but excluding IVF.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not available centrally. However, some information on these matters is expected to be published in the Interim Licensing Authority's 1991 annual report later this year.

Eye Hospitals

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the regional health authorities that have a specialist eye hospital in their region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The location of specialist eye services is a matter for the health authority concerned. The information requested is as follows:

Northern
- Eye Infirmary, Sunderland
- North Riding Infirmary (ENT and Eye)

North West Thames
- Western Ophthalmic Hospital

South East Thames
- Sussex Eye Hospital
- Kent County Ophthalmic and Aural Hospital

Wessex
- Southampton Eye Hospital

Oxford
- Oxford Eye Hospital

South Western
- Bristol Eye Hospital
- West of England Eye Infirmary
- Royal Eye Infirmary, Plymouth

West Midlands
- Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, Shrewsbury
- Wolverhampton and Midlands Counties Eye Infirmary
- Paybody Hospital, Coventry
- Worcester Eye Hospital
- Birmingham and Midland Eye Hospital

Mersey
- St. Paul's Eye Hospital

North Western
- Manchester Royal Eye Hospital

Special Health Authorities
- Moorfield's Eye Hospital

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures showing the number of *(a)* twins, *(b)* triplets, *(c)* quadruplets, *(d)* quintuplets and *(e)* sextuplets born in England and Wales in 1990; what was the total number of maternities in that year; and what was the total number of multiple cases of each type which were conceived as a result of (i) IVF, (ii) GIFT and (iii) other forms of assisted births.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In 1990, there were 701,130 maternities in England and Wales. These included:

	Numbers
Twins	7,934
Triplets	201
Quadruplets	10
Quintuplets or over	0
Total number of maternities with multiple births	8,145

Data on the number of births which occurred following IVF, GIFT or other procedures to assist conception are not yet available.

Female Circumcision

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he is going to issue new interdepartmental guidelines on inter-agency working in cases of child protection, with special reference to female genital mutilation.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidelines on inter-agency working in cases of child protection are to be issued under the title of "Working Together" in Autumn 1991. This will draw attention to the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985.

Manchester Hospital Trusts

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on further plans for changes in the provision of services and jobs within the opted-out hospitals in central and south Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: National health service trusts in central and south Manchester will ensure that they respond to priorities set by district health authorities and fund holders.

Health Care, London

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received a copy of a report published by the Health Economics Consortium at York university called a "Review of the Evidence of Higher Costs of Health Care Provision in Inner London and a Consideration of Implications for Competitiveness."

Mr. Dorrell: We received a copy of this report on 24 April from the Inner London Health Authorities Group who commissioned it. We are studying it carefully and will be discussing any implications with the Thames regional health authorities.

Regional Health Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure by each regional health authority in each year since 1978-79 in cash terms and adjusted for changes in input unit costs.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 16 April 1991]:* Tables showing the total revenue and total capital expenditure by regional health authorities for the years since 1978-79 have been placed in the Library.

The figures for RHAs are influenced by the extent to which they directly manage and account for services, including capital schemes; the balance of such responsibility between the RHA and the district health authorities comprising each region varies from one region to another and has been subject to changes over the period. Additional tables showing expenditure by health regions —RHAs and DHAs—have therefore been provided.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Doncaster Office

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many items of post are outstanding currently at his Department's offices in the Doncaster area;

(2) what are his current plans to alter the structure and staffing levels of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area;

(3) how many staff are employed and at what level in each of his Department's offices covering the Doncaster area; and what were the comparable figures *(a)* 12 months ago and *(b)* 24 months ago.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensioners, Plaistow

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in the E6 and E13 postal districts served by the Plaistow office have not received pensions for up to five or more weeks due to non-receipt of pension books; and if he will make a statement concerning the visit of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), to the office on 30 April.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested, since local social security offices do not keep statistical records of delay in issuing instruments of payment. When this problem occurs, it is dealt with on an individual basis. The manager of the Plaistow office is aware of a number of cases of non-receipt of new order books in time for the next pay day.

I visited Newham district, which comprises the offices at Stratford, Plaistow and Canning Town, on 30 April. I saw the problems associated with accommodation in the district. The situation is being addressed urgently and a number of options are being pursued to improve the service to our customers.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Language Studies

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ensure that French or German will continue to be offered in primary schools after the modern language option in primary B. Ed courses in Northern Ireland has been discontinued.

Dr. Mawhinney: Language studies is not a compulsory area of study within the common curriculum at primary level; it is, therefore, a matter for schools to decide whether to offer a modern language to their pupils.

The proportion of primary schools which teach French is small and there is no evidence that this provision is constrained by a shortage of teachers. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland is not aware of German being offered by any primary schools; nor was this language available as an option in the B.Ed.

The Department has recently established a working group on modern languages, which will prepare programmes of study and attainment targets for key stages 3 and 4. It is expected that the working group will offer comment on the introduction of modern languages at earlier stages.

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish details of regulations and licences to cover generators, transmission, distribution and supply and the grid code for successor companies to Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: I expect to be able to place preliminary drafts of licences for the generation, transmission and supply of electricity in the Libraries of both Houses and in the Assembly Vote Office at Stormont before the end of June 1991. Details of a grid code will be available later in the year.

Limavady-Aghinaloo Road

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects work to begin on upgrading the road between Limavady and the industrial site at Aghinaloo.

Mr. Needham: No proposals exist for such upgrading.

Fair Employment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of the executive directors in each of the four area health and social services boards; whether their appointments comply with the provisions of the fair employment guidelines; if these appointments reflect the religious breakdown of the work forces in their respective areas; and if he will make a statement about the proportion of Protestants employed by the area health and social services boards.

Mr. Hanley: The names of the officer members of each health and social services board, appointed to date, are as follows:

Eastern board:
- Mr. P. G. Kinder
- Mr. I. R. Reid

Northern board:
- Mr. D. D. Smyth
- Mr. R. S. Ross
- Miss M. S. Irwin
- Mr. J. S. MacDonnell
- Miss E. M. McNair
- Dr. J. D. Watson

Southern board:
- Mr. J. E. Lamb
- Mr. B. P. Cunningham
- Mr. R. Blair
- Mr. M. Doris
- Dr. P. Kilbane
- Mr. F. A. Rice
- Mr. T. J. Frawley
- Mr. S. Cuddy
- Mr. D. Burke
- Dr. W. W. McConnell

Members of health and social services boards are holders of an office; in that capacity they do not act as officers or employees of the boards, and their appointments as members of the boards do not fall within the scope of the Fair Employment Acts 1976 and 1989. As for their capacity as officers—that is, as employees—of the boards, I am satisfied that the procedures for appointment are such that any appointments since 1976 have been made with due and proper regard for the law relating to fair employment.

With regard to the request for a statement on the proportion of Protestants employed by the boards, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the recent publication by the Fair Employment Commission, "A Profile of the Workforce in Northern Ireland: A Survey of the 1990 Monitoring Returns", copies of which are in the Library. This shows that the employees of the four health and social services boards were composed of 50·9 per cent. Protestants, 39·3 per cent. Roman Catholic and 9·8 per cent. non-determined. Excluding those for whom a community was not determined, the proportion of Protestants was 56·5 per cent.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will detail the number of strip searches made on female persons in Her Majesty's prison Maghaberry monthly since May 1990, giving the number of persons involved and the number of times each person was searched; if any prison contraband, smuggled item, or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being conducted; and what were the reasons for the search.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of the number of, and reasons for, strip searches of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison Maghaberry from December 1989 to May 1990 were provided on 4 July 1990, at columns *601-4*. The statistics from June 1990 to March 1991 are as follows:

	1990							1991		
Number of searches	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Total number of searches carried out	27	28	25	37	56	39	37	21	16	37
Total number of inmates searched	19	22	17	26	31	21	21	15	16	27
Number of prisoners searched once	13	17	9	18	23	15	13	10	16	18
Number of prisoners searched twice	5	4	8	6	7	4	6	4	nil	8
Number of prisoners searched more than twice	1	1	nil	2	1	2	2	1	nil	1
Reasons for search										
First admission on remand/ awaiting trial	11	7	4	7	13	7	2	4	4	10
First admission on sentence/final discharge	5	12	13	13	15	14	8	7	5	15
Attending remand court	nil	nil	nil	nil	1	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Attending trial	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	1	1	nil	nil
Inter-prison visit	3	2	nil	5	1	2	7	4	3	5
Pre-release home leave	7	7	6	9	4	3	8	2	3	2
Compassionate home leave	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Visits to outside hospital	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	2	nil	nil	nil
Returning from bail application	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Attendance at court for bail	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	1	nil
Fines paid	1	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	2	nil	nil
Working out scheme	nil	nil	nil	2	19	13	9	nil	nil	nil
Bail granted	nil	nil	2	1	3	nil	nil	1	nil	5

No prohibited article was found during these searches and no prisoner refused to be searched.

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish figures showing the number of *(a)* twins, *(b)* triplets, *(c)* quadruplets, *(d)* quintuplets and *(e)* sextuplets born in Northern Ireland in 1990; what was the total number of maternities in Northern Ireland for that year; and what was the total number of multiple cases of each type which were conceived as a result of (i) IVF, (ii) GIFT and (iii) other forms of assisted births.

Mr. Hanley: The information on multiple births and maternities will be included in the Registrar General's annual report which will be published in June 1992. However, figures will be available in unpublished form by the end of May 1991 and I will send a copy to the hon. Member when they are available. In 1990, seven sets of twins and two sets of triplets were conceived following IVF treatment. There were no multiple births resulting from other forms of specialist infertility treatments.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of his Department.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 26 April 1991]:* It would require disproportionate time and cost to provide data on staff complements from 1979.

The available information including vacant posts is as follows:

	Staff complement	*Staff in post as at 1 April*
1989-90	52	50
1990-91	61	54
1991-92	60	58

WALES

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 1 May 1991.

Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Houses

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the 10 Welsh housing authorities which share the £4·29 million for prefabricated reinforced concrete houses; how much each received for which purposes; and how many prefabricated reinforced concrete houses are involved in each housing authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* The 10 authorities which share the additional allocation are shown as follows, together with the amounts made available, and the numbers of precast concrete houses in each authority's area.

The additional resources are mainly to help homeowners who are eligible for assistance under the housing defects legislation. The allocation for Glyndwr and Port Talbot is to assist in dealing with particular difficulties over system built houses in their own stock. The additional funds are allocated against ongoing reinstatement programmes and not specific dwellings.

Stock of PRC Houses (at 1 April 1989)[1]

	LA stock	*Private sector*	*Total*	*Additional allocation* £
Brecknock	228	28	256	120,000
Cardiff	172	16	188	500,000
Ceredigion	146	34	180	400,000
Dinefwr	143	29	172	150,000
Glyndwr	191	21	212	66,000
Monmouth	529	260	789	1,200,000
Newport	166	177	343	750,000
Port Talbot	650	80	730	500,000
Ogwr	774	142	916	175,000
Swansea	1,343	29	1,372	430,000

[1] Latest available verified information.

Wool

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning his assessment of the prospects in 1991 and 1992 for the Welsh wool-producing sector of agriculture.

Mr. David Hunt: Returns in Wales from wool production form, on average, 4 to 6 per cent. of individual producers' total returns from sheep farming. Prospects for wool producers thus depend on a range of factors, including market prices and input costs. Prices for finished lambs in 1991 so far have been following the usual seasonal trend and prices for British wool, although weak, have shown some improvement in recent sales. In addition, Welsh sheep farmers enjoy significant financial support through the EC sheep regime and hill livestock compensatory allowances. This support, which takes account of both market prices and income levels, is estimated to total some £96 million in 1990.

Craft Industry

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the funding of the craft industry in Wales by the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales respectively.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Development Agency and Development Board for Rural Wales contribute a grant to the Wales Craft Council, employ craft business advisers and undertake a range of marketing activities. Also, craft producers are able to apply for a range of general grants, loans and business services offered by the agencies. The development board estimates support will amount to more than £220,000 in the current financial year. WDA support is estimated at £518,500. Craftspeople may also apply for the services and grants offered by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the extent of any public funding of the Wales Craft Council for 1991-92, including any conditions upon which such funding will be based.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales have agreed to provide a total of £40,000 a year for two years to the Wales Craft Council to cover specific activities. The funding will be subject to normal conditions.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the report which he received recently from the Welsh Development Agency concerning the craft industry in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received no such report. I have, however, received an evaluation of the craft initiative, prepared by my Department in consultation with the Welsh Development Agency, among others, and I have placed a copy of this in the Library.

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures for 1990 showing the estimated percentage of women delivering in Wales whose deliveries were *(a)* spontaneous, including abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous, *(b)* instrumental, including forceps, vacuum and breech extractions, *(c)* caesarean section and *(d)* other and unspecified means.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not yet available for 1990. Figures for 1989 are given in the table.

Estimated percentages of hospital deliveries by type of delivery: Wales 1989

Type of delivery	*Estimated percentage*
Spontaneous	80·0
Instrumental	7·0
Caesarean	13·0

Note: The information is based on OPCS 4th revision codes for the classification of surgical operations and procedures which were introduced in 1988.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures for 1990 showing the estimated percentage of women delivering in Wales *(a)* whose labours were induced, *(b)* whose labours were of spontaneous onset and *(c)* who had elective caesarean section.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not yet available for 1990. Figures for 1989 are given in the table.

Estimated percentages of hospital deliveries by type of onset of labour: Wales 1989

Type of onset of labour	*Estimated percentage*
Induced	3·0
Spontaneous	85·0
Elective caesarean	5·0
Other caesarean	7·0

Note: The information is based on OPCS 4th revision codes for the classification of surgical operations and procedures which were introduced in 1988.

East Glamorgan District General Hospital

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the date upon which construction work will commence on the replacement East Glamorgan district general hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for Mid Glamorgan health authority to decide the date in which construction work commences.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beds are to be included in the replacement East Glamorgan district general hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This new hospital development is being planned on the basis of a district general hospital of 640 beds. Initially it is proposed that 533 beds will be provided.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that sufficient revenue capital will be available to ensure that the existing level of health provision at East Glamorgan district general hospital will be maintained until the opening of the replacement East Glamorgan hospital; and if he will make a statement as to the likely cost, per annum, of ensuring that provision.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Until such time as the new hospital is open, services will continue to be provided from East Glamorgan hospital. The extent to which services are provided will depend upon the contracts placed with the hospital by the purchasers of its services—mainly Mid Glamorgan health authority and the local GP fund-holding practices. Health authorities and GP fund holders have a duty to secure the best quality and value for money in the services they obtain with the funds provided to them. They will have to satisfy themselves that East Glamorgan hospital meets these criteria if the existing level of provision is to be maintained or increased.

Cardiac Patients

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many health authorities in Wales, besides Mid Glamorgan, have issued directives or recommendations that patients of 70 year of age or over, suffering from cardiac conditions, should be treated differently from patients who have not reached that age.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally. Admission policies and the provision of health care are matters for health authorities to determine in the light of local circumstances and in the best interest of patients.

Asthma

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by health authority district, the number of in-patients admitted to hospitals in Wales who were diagnosed as suffering from asthma in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of in-patient deaths and discharges from NHS hospitals in Wales, by district health authority of treatment, with a principal diagnosis of asthma is shown in the table for 1987, 1988 and 1989. Information for 1990 and 1991 is not yet available.

In-Patient deaths and discharges with principal diagnosis of Asthma[1] [2]

	1987	*1988*	*1989*
Clwyd	640	686	690
East Dyfed	365	388	311
Gwent	825	901	793
Gwynedd	440	409	339
Mid Glamorgan	1,102	1,147	881
Powys	87	90	135
South Glamorgan	1,108	1,299	1,108
West Glamorgan	786	907	902
Pembrokeshire	192	218	217

[1] Excludes day cases.
[2] The information may understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths.

Neath and Port Talbot Hospital

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a date upon which work will begin on the new Neath and Port Talbot hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for the West Glamorgan health authority to decide the date on which work commences.

Conwy Tunnel

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the cost to the tourism industry of the delays in opening the Conwy tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There has been no significant delay in the construction of the A55 Conwy crossing scheme, which is planned for completion this autumn. The upgrading of 51 of the 60 miles of the A55 to dual carriageway standard has already greatly enhanced prospects for the economy of north Wales, including the tourism industry.

Pregnancy Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures for 1990 of the number of clinics in Wales offering *(a)* in vitro fertilisation—IVF—gamete inter-fallopian transfer—GIFT—and other procedures and (ii) GIFT and other procedures but excluding IVF.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available centrally.

Archaeological Remains

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce legislation to require planning authorities in Wales to inform solicitors making their local searches if there are archaeological remains present on the land.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. Archaeological remains scheduled as being of national importance under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments Archaeological Areas Act 1979 are registered as land charges and can be identified during local searches. Details of other archaeological remains are not registered as land charges but information on these is held by the four Welsh archaeological trusts which may be consulted.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to issue a policy planning guidance document in Wales, similar to the PPG 16 issued by the Department of the Environment in November 1990, on archaeology and planning.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Yes. A draft PPG on archaeology and planning in Wales was issued for consultation in September 1990. A copy is available in the Library of the House. We have had a positive response and expect to issue this guidance shortly.

Public Bodies

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies in Wales scheduled for financial management and policy reviews during the current financial year.

Mr. David Hunt: In accordance with the arrangements for undertaking regular, five-year reviews of NDPBs announced by the then Prime Minister on 28 January 1988 the Welsh Office will be undertaking financial management and policy reviews of the Welsh Development Agency, Development Board for Rural Wales, Land Authority for Wales, Sports Council for Wales and the Wales tourist board during 1991-92.

Welsh Language

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the outcome of his recent consultation on exemptions from, and implementation timetable for, teaching Welsh in the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The implementation of the national curriculum and any exemption from it must be considered in the context of my overall policy for the teaching of Welsh in schools. The Education Reform Act 1988 provided that Welsh is an integral part of the curriculum for schools in Wales. I reaffirm the general policy aim, which I announced to the House on 22 January, that Welsh should be studied by all pupils in schools in Wales between the ages of five and 16, though not necessarily to full GCSE level.

The consultation document on exemptions which I issued last November set out specific criteria and circumstances under which I was prepared to consider a limited range of exemptions from the national curriculum requirements to teach Welsh.

I propose that there should be an exemption of incoming pupils who transfer late in their school careers to schools in Wales and who had little or no opportunity for studying the language in school in the previous three years. These draft regulations were widely supported. The regulations will also apply to pupils who meet these criteria and who transfer between schools in Wales. All pupils to whom this exemption will apply, will retain the right to

study the language if they wish and schools will be encouraged to offer them this option. I now intend to proceed to make the relevant regulations.

There was general approval for my proposals to allow an extended implementation timetable for some schools in four LEAs—Dyfed, Gwent, Powys and South Glamorgan. Two of the schools in Dyfed—Tasker-Millward and Pembroke—have now indicated that they will introduce the national curriculum requirements for Welsh earlier than proposed. I welcome this positive approach. Six other schools requested deferment. Each case has been carefully considered and of these, Fitzalan high school, Cardiff, will be added to the draft order which I am now issuing for consultation.

My proposals set out two very specific sets of criteria for the exemptions of a small number of schools from the key stage 4 requirements for Welsh. The Curriculum Council for Wales and a number of organisations, including some teacher associations, were opposed to any exemption in key stage 4. In view of this response, and the advice received from the Curriculum Council for Wales I have reviewed both sets of proposals strictly in line with the criteria set out in my consultation document.

The first of the exemption proposals related to the five secondary schools in the South Pembrokeshire area covering the period up to 1996-97 by which time all of these schools, in line with the agreement with the LEA, will be expected to introduce fully the key stage 3 requirements. A further 12 schools sought deferment on grounds of similar area characteristics. None was supported by their LEAs and since my proposals applied only to the schools in South Pembrokeshire, the exemptions to be included in a draft order will be limited to these schools.

Secondly, in the consultation document of November 1990, exemption from the key stage 4 requirements was also proposed for a group of seven schools—six in Clwyd and one in Gwent—with catchment areas or potential catchment areas for pupils across the English border. These proposals reflected the concerns expressed by the headteachers and governing bodies of the schools about the potential loss of pupil numbers. Subsequently a further 11 schools requested similar consideration.

I have carefully considered the position in the light of the review to which I referred above. I have taken into account the significant number of requests for further exemptions on grounds of catchment areas and the impact such exemptions would have on Welsh education in these areas and on my overall policy for teaching Welsh in schools. As a result of the representations made and by consideration of all the factors, I have decided to reduce the number of exemptions in this category. It will be limited to three schools in Clwyd and two in Gwent. These schools are: Darland high school; St. David's high school, Saltney; the Maelor school, Penley; Chepstow and Monmouth comprehensive schools. They will be included in the draft order which I am now issuing for consultation. I should stress that all exempted schools will be encouraged to make arrangements for Welsh to be an option at key stage 4 for those pupils who choose it.

Some secondary schools also requested exemption from the key stage 3 requirements. I made no proposals for such exemption and do not intend to do so. All secondary schools in Wales will be required to introduce the key stage 3 requirements for the teaching of Welsh.

The Curriculum Council for Wales and other bodies expressed the view that all exemptions should be subject to review. I accept that advice. A review will be carried out in the 1996-97 academic year to consider all exemptions. By that time I will expect all schools and LEAs to have established implementation plans to introduce the teaching of the language in all key stages in line with my overall policy for Welsh which I outlined earlier.

Veterinary Investigation Centre, Bangor

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning the future of the veterinary investigation centre at Bangor since November 1990; and how many of the representations are opposed to the closure.

Mr. David Hunt: Sixteen representations indicating opposition to the closure of the Bangor centre have been received since November 1990.

Farm Costs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the variable input costs accrued on farms in Wales in each of the last 15 years according to farm size and farm type.

Mr. David Hunt: Information showing the variable input costs for farms of the same types and sizes is only readily available since 1984-85 and is as follows:

Variable costs by type and size

	Small	*Medium*	*Large*	*All sizes*
Specialist Dairy				
1984-85	—	—	—	23,679
1985-86	—	—	—	23,259
1986-87	—	—	—	27,464
1987-88	—	—	—	22,354
1988-89	—	—	—	23,750
1989-90	—	—	—	26,299
Mainly Dairy				
1984-85	—	—	—	26,711
1985-86	—	—	—	27,374
1986-87	—	—	—	29,330
1987-88	—	—	—	26,900
1988-89	—	—	—	28,273
1989-90	—	—	—	31,242
All Dairy				
1984-85	11,299	28,108	69,248	24,458
1985-86	11,275	27,684	69,905	24,317
1986-87	11,706	29,492	69,876	25,672
1987-88	10,052	26,026	64,263	23,545
1988-89	11,140	26,421	67,419	25,133
1989-90	11,882	28,930	72,161	27,721
Hill and Upland SDA sheep				
1984-85	—	—	—	13,362
1985-86	—	—	—	13,769
1986-87	—	—	—	13,943
1987-88	—	—	—	14,804
1988-89	—	—	—	14,886
1989-90	—	—	—	15,068
Hill and Upland SDA Cattle and Sheep				
1984-85	—	—	—	13,188
1985-86	—	—	—	13,068
1986-87	—	—	—	15,260
1987-88	—	—	—	14,874
1988-89	—	—	—	15,067
1989-90	—	—	—	19,108

	Small	Medium	Large	All sizes
All Hill and Upland LFA Livestock				
1984-85	6,861	19,167	42,853	13,304
1985-86	6,944	20,361	59,168	13,577
1986-87	8,115	21,798	44,017	14,952
1987-88	6,917	20,707	52,451	14,132
1988-89	7,643	19,578	49,441	14,732
1989-90	7,534	20,855	54,748	15,133
All Dairy and Livestock				
1984-85	8,312	24,338	58,194	17,354
1985-86	8,353	24,373	56,924	17,315
1986-87	9,337	25,052	58,228	18,514
1987-88	7,694	22,895	58,997	17,247
1988-89	8,485	22,278	58,525	17,712
1989-90	8,803	24,135	63,991	19,075

Farm Incomes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the net farm income figures, excluding breeding livestock appreciation, for farms in Wales according to farm size and farm type in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. David Hunt: Consistent information on net farm incomes by farm type and farm size is only available since 1984-85 and is as follows:

Net farm income by size and type

	Small	Medium	Large	All sizes
Specialist Dairy				
1984-85	—	—	—	6,346
1985-86	—	—	—	10,614
1986-87	—	—	—	10,932
1987-88	—	—	—	16,073
1988-89	—	—	—	21,328
1989-90	—	—	—	21,628
Mainly Dairy				
1984-85	—	—	—	8,507
1985-86	—	—	—	10,109
1986-87	—	—	—	12,554
1987-88	—	—	—	17,096
1988-89	—	—	—	20,496
1989-90	—	—	—	21,836
All Dairy				
1984-85	3,075	7,835	20,537	6,901
1985-86	5,106	12,143	27,981	10,485
1986-87	5,342	13,198	29,266	11,335
1987-88	9,459	16,804	40,482	16,341
1988-89	10,262	21,893	54,660	21,099
1989-90	10,370	22,402	54,032	21,688
Hill and Upland SDA sheep				
1984-85	—	—	—	10,223
1985-86	—	—	—	7,026
1986-87	—	—	—	9,792
1987-88	—	—	—	9,380
1988-89	—	—	—	15,283
1989-90	—	—	—	9,468
Hill and Upland SDA Cattle and Sheep				
1984-85	—	—	—	7,754
1985-86	—	—	—	9,041
1986-87	—	—	—	9,348
1987-88	—	—	—	12,491
1988-89	—	—	—	16,381
1989-90	—	—	—	10,881

	Small	Medium	Large	All sizes
All Hill and Upland LFA Livestock				
1984-85	3,374	14,153	29,409	8,721
1985-86	2,632	14,256	16,161	7,616
1986-87	3,216	13,101	24,739	7,906
1987-88	3,770	14,929	31,692	9,453
1988-89	6,454	19,251	54,207	14,250
1989-90	2,198	13,762	43,363	8,805
All Dairy and Livestock				
1984-85	2,752	10,665	24,252	7,026
1985-86	3,357	12,320	23,031	7,914
1986-87	3,609	12,433	27,225	8,508
1987-88	5,077	19,970	33,115	11,243
1988-89	7,277	19,749	54,436	15,767
1989-90	4,019	16,405	48,085	12,277

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the net income from management and investment in farms in Wales in each of the last 15 years according to farm size and farm type.

Mr. David Hunt: Details of management and investment income are only available for years since 1986-87 and are as follows:

(£000)

Farm type	*Management and investment income*		
	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Specialist Dairy	6·4	9·5	13·5
Mainly Dairy	6·6	10·5	13·2
All Dairy	6·4	9·8	13·5
Hill and Upland Sheep	2·8	4·6	9·1
Hill and Upland Cattle Sheep	1·7	4·3	8·6
All Hill and Upland (LFA) Livestock	1·6	3·8	7·9

Farm Investment

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the level of investment in new buildings, plant and machinery in farms in Wales in each of the last 15 years according to farm size and farm type.

Mr. David Hunt: Investment details by farm type and size are not available. Figures for aggregate capital formation in plant and machinery are however published in "Farm Incomes in Wales", volume 4, table 3.11, and average investment per farm, by type and tenure is collected as part of the farm business survey and published annually in the same source.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the amount of total interest bills and outstanding bank advances secured by farms in Wales in each of the last 15 years according to farm size and farm type.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available for the number of years or in the form requested. Data collected since 1985-86 shows average bank advances outstanding and interest payments made per farm to be as follows:

£000

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
LFA Livestock Farms				
Average Bank Advance	17·9	23·2	35·7	23·9
Interest Payments	2·6	3·7	4·9	3·6
All Dairy Farms				
Average Bank Advance	39·6	29·1	32·3	30·0
Interest Payments	4·8	5·1	4·3	4·2

Forestry

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been allocated by his Department to Coed Cymru in each year since 1985; and what is the estimated allocation to be granted for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Coed Cymru does not receive any financial support from the Welsh Office but is jointly funded by the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Council for Wales and local authorities.

Unfit Dwellings

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table of the most recent available data showing the number of unfit dwellings in each local authority area in Wales, for the categories *(a)* unfit local authority properties, *(b)* unfit housing association properties, *(c)* unfit public sector properties, other than local authority-owned and *(d)* unfit private sector properties, other than housing association owned.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The 1986 Welsh house condition survey estimated the number of unfit dwellings in each local authority area in Wales for the following categories:

(a) local authority properties
(b) Housing Association properties
(c) New Town Corporation properties
(d) private Sector properties

as shown in the following table:

Unfit dwellings in Wales, 1986

	Total	Local authority	New Town corporation	Housing association[1]	Private sector[2]
Alyn and Deeside	1,253	62	—	—	1,192
Colwyn	257	85	—	—	173
Delyn	450	95	—	—	355
Glyndwr	623	43	—	—	580
Rhuddlan	537	—	—	—	537
Wrexham Maelor	1,665	857	—	—	807
Carmarthen	1,216	91	—	—	1,125
Ceredigion	3,499	111	—	41	3,348
Dinefwr	1,902	36	—	—	1,867
Llanelli	2,960	707	—	—	2,253
Preseli	2,908	104	—	—	2,804
South Pembrokeshire	832	63	—	—	769
Blaenau Gwent	2,903	399	—	—	2,504
Islwyn	771	44	—	—	727
Monmouth	2,199	220	—	81	1,898
Newport	953	78	—	—	875
Torfaen	976	66	—	—	910
Aberconwy	281	122	—	—	160
Arfon	1,285	239	—	—	1,047
Dwyfor	1,611	94	—	—	1,517
Meirionnydd	310	—	—	—	310
Ynys Mon	966	110	—	—	857
Cynon Valley	3,882	167	—	—	3,715
Merthyr Tydfil	2,271	150	—	42	2,079
Ogwr	3,107	323	—	—	2,783
Rhondda	4,533	279	—	141	4,113
Rhymney Valley	2,006	157	—	58	1,791
Taff-Ely	2,492	202	—	—	2,289
Brecknock	929	18	—	31	880
Montgomeryshire	1,591	—	—	—	1,591
Radnor	461	—	—	—	462
Cardiff	8,315	1,561	—	—	6,754
Vale of Glamorgan	1,389	271	—	—	1,118
Port Talbot	1,354	558	—	—	796
Lliw Valley	1,881	108	—	—	1,773
Neath	1,799	256	—	—	1,543
Swansea	5,320	767	—	—	4,553
WALES	71,687	8,440	—	394	62,853

[1] Includes charitable trusts
[2] Owner occupied and private rented
Source: 1986 Welsh House Condition Survey

Abattoirs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to increase resources for the smaller abattoirs of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Experimental Husbandry Farm, Pwllpeiran

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make a statement on the future of the experimental husbandry farm at Pwllpeiran.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing, for each local authority in Wales, the number of persons accepted as homeless in each year since 1979 inclusive.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The numbers of persons accepted as homeless by each local authority for each year since 1979 are shown in the table.

Persons accepted as homeless 1979-1990 by district

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*[1]1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*[2]1990*
Aberconwy	151	203	159	130	99	167	74	153	177	108	162	137
Alyn and Deeside	301	250	205	237	251	239	427	366	330	485	528	474
Arfon	80	59	51	55	61	38	62	51	102	63	65	77
Blaenau Gwent	333	361	388	464	459	454	447	489	463	595	695	841
Brecknock	69	114	86	160	152	134	217	162	180	176	243	269
Cardiff	690	1,410	973	1,053	730	862	1,646	1,751	1,592	2,971	3,334	2,483
Carmarthen	187	160	152	127	192	138	218	165	255	213	164	137
Ceredigion	94	102	92	103	149	203	149	140	188	187	180	331
Colwyn	55	40	42	72	55	60	71	102	104	87	93	103
Cynon Valley	898	1,018	965	985	1,207	959	840	942	603	710	530	623
Delyn	175	151	264	240	197	255	297	391	712	679	1,002	825
Dinefwr	49	34	35	108	31	67	104	93	141	185	124	181
Dwyfor	138	60	106	74	69	124	126	142	163	119	178	162
Glyndwr	56	54	63	39	37	52	64	55	63	30	43	46
Islwyn	189	175	159	68	118	143	142	139	121	204	313	370
Llanelli	133	100	140	179	219	213	227	371	408	302	343	297
Lliw Valley	113	129	134	140	119	204	158	205	254	143	288	338
Meirionnydd	369	489	235	145	159	106	106	147	137	210	230	250
Merthyr Tydfil	454	392	272	238	253	232	225	179	207	191	359	496
Monmouth	515	380	532	437	475	447	717	664	618	576	357	281
Montgomeryshire	124	110	125	89	83	58	52	97	100	156	127	188
Neath	481	483	624	[3]. .	1,016	965	806	793	629	636	496	610
Newport	864	1,110	1,358	1,300	1,218	1,199	1,513	1,258	1,550	1,635	2,460	2,696
Ogwr	338	343	517	736	599	448	826	1,667	994	1,193	1,176	1,332
Port Talbot (Afan)	170	133	94	112	160	226	164	304	357	327	442	303
Preseli Pembrokeshire	135	164	130	97	96	78	148	108	176	194	153	209
Radnorshire	19	38	45	14	19	34	54	23	31	60	36	64
Rhondda	569	834	1,164	1,049	852	479	317	320	268	270	292	166
Rhuddlan	237	139	172	257	268	204	242	249	296	256	273	293
Rhymney Valley	534	720	510	284	418	344	629	643	410	580	655	439
South Pembrokeshire	143	188	181	202	230	280	224	165	210	271	241	248
Swansea	1,604	1,838	2,820	1,887	1,416	1,396	762	685	654	439	345	450
Taff-Ely	390	253	200	188	158	176	186	278	321	395	442	568
Torfaen	1,049	978	723	790	675	426	531	958	708	881	968	1,216
Vale of Glamorgan	620	749	636	1,329	896	726	570	427	293	755	1,042	1,160
Wrexham Maelor	235	471	353	212	238	441	411	567	522	717	740	863
Ynys Mon	137	83	33	26	44	54	50	62	65	106	49	97
Wales Total	12,698	14,315	14,738	13,626	13,418	12,631	13,802	15,311	14,402	17,105	19,168	19,623

[1] Excludes data for Islwyn for the October to December quarter.
[2] Figures exclude those made homeless in Colwyn as a result of the major flooding incident in February 1990. No breakdown by number of persons is available.
[3] . . = Not available.

Farm Diversification

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of representations received by his Department concerning the axeing of grant aid for converting farm buildings into tourist accommodation under the farm diversification grant scheme; and how many representatives have been critical of this decision.

Mr. David Hunt: The statutory instrument ending capital grant assistance for tourist accommodation, other than for camping and bunkhouse barns, under the farm diversification grant scheme came into operation on 16 January 1991. As of 30 April my Department had received 11 letters concerning the withdrawal of this grant assistance, of which 10 questioned the decision.

Education Spending

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the revenue budget for 1990-91 and *(b)* the standard spending assessment for 1990-91 for each local education authority in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The standard spending assessment for each county council in Wales relates to the totality of

services it provides and is not hypothecated to individual services. The following table gives the 1990-91 standard spending assessment for each county, together with the comparable estimated revenue expenditure:

1990-91

£ million

	Estimated net revenue expenditure[1]	*Standard spending assessment*
Clwyd	244·9	225·4
Dyfed	208·5	202·3
Gwent	256·4	248·4
Gwynedd	145·5	142·2
Mid Glamorgan	328·7	320·1
Powys	78·0	77·7
South Glamorgan	234·7	228·7
West Glamorgan	221·4	205·4

[1] Net of sales, fees, charges and specific grants.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the capital bid for 1990-91 and *(b)* the capital allocation for 1990-91 for each local education authority in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Capital resources for Welsh local authorities, including those allocated to education authorities are distributed mainly by means of formulae which have been endorsed by the local authority associations. They are not hypothecated to particular services and are not subject to bids. At the all-Wales level I set the total assumed gross expenditure for education in 1990-91 at £53·7 million. The latest available projection, at October 1990, by local authorities of their planned spending was £49·3 million.

WDA Industrial Units

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh Development Agency industrial units are empty awaiting tenants in each of the counties of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Number of units vacant and available for letting (as at 30 April 1991)

County	*Number*
Clwyd	55
Dyfed	42
Gwent	87
Gwynedd	62
Mid Glamorgan	76
South Glamorgan	3
West Glamorgan	38

These vacancies represent 11 per cent. of the agency's total portfolio.

Housing Investment Programme

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing, for each local authority in Wales, the *(a)* 1990-91 housing investment programme bid and *(b)* 1990-91 housing investment programme allocation of capital spending.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Local authorities were not asked to specify in their housing strategy and investment programmes the level of central Government input they required towards their 1990-91 housing programmes. Details of housing annual capital guidelines—ACG—and supplementary credit approvals—SCA—for discretionary home renovation grants and special projects for each authority in 1990-91 are given in the table. The figures exclude resources for old style home improvement grants and mandatory home renovation grants for which final claims have yet to be submitted.

£ million

Authority	*Housing ACG*	*SCA Discretionary Grants*	*SCA Other*
Alyn and Deeside	1·752	0·157	0·130
Colwyn	1·077	0·137	0·286
Delyn	1·611	0·143	0·850
Glyndwr	1·093	0·125	—
Rhuddlan	1·053	0·164	1·904
Wrexham Maelor	5·925	0·298	0·230
Carmarthen	1·277	0·202	0·306
Ceredigion	1·227	0·248	0·520
Dinefwr	0·996	0·189	2·015
Llanelli	3·757	0·335	—
Preseli Pembroke	2·004	0·327	1·576
South Pembroke	1·066	0·116	—
Blaenau Gwent	3·597	0·433	0·267
Islwyn	1·884	0·180	1·750
Monmouth	2·150	0·290	1·624
Newport	2·971	0·312	2·834
Torfaen	3·580	0·213	2·183
Aberconwy	1·279	0·158	0·400
Arfon	2·206	0·233	2·537
Dwyfor	0·915	0·186	0·415
Meirionnydd	0·696	0·108	1·534
Ynys Mon	1·675	0·203	1·151
Cynon Valley	2·328	0·522	5·257
Merthyr Tydfil	2·167	0·210	0·997
Ogwr	3·306	0·351	0·220
Rhondda	2·325	0·548	3·931
Rhymney Valley	4·035	0·373	0·300
Taff Ely	2·602	0·229	—
Brecknock	1·051	0·166	0·965
Montgomeryshire	1·260	0·242	2·395
Radnorshire	0·418	0·119	0·344
Cardiff	7·089	0·949	6·090
Vale of Glamorgan	2·487	0·314	—
Port Talbot	3·085	0·204	1·070
Lliw Valley	2·222	0·263	0·342
Neath	2·157	0·181	—
Swansea	6·608	0·571	1·090
Wales	86·929	10·000	45·513

Right to Buy

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the number of right-to-buy sales completed in each local authority in Wales since the Housing Act 1980 came into force.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is given in the table:

Total Right to Buy Sales[1]

Welsh Districts	*October 1980—December 1990*
Aberconwy	1,712
Alyn and Deeside	1,509
Arfon	1,369
Blaenau Gwent	2,322
Brecknock	1,435
Cardiff	7,607
Carmarthen	171
Ceredigion	1,417

Welsh Districts	*October 1980—December 1990*
Colwyn	0
Cynon Valley	1,481
Delyn	1,215
Dinefwr	872
Dwyfor	385
Glyndwr	1,244
Islwyn	3,654
Llanelli	3,352
Lliw Valley	1,895
Meirionnydd	871
Merthyr Tydfil	2,193
Monmouth	1,859
Montgomeryshire	1,333
Neath	2,398
Newport	4,077
Ogwr	4,520
Port Talbot	3,455
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2,269
Radnorshire	571
Rhondda	741
Rhuddlan	912
Rhymney Valley	3,675
South Pembrokeshire	833
Swansea	4,010
Taff-Ely	3,820
Torfaen	3,706
Vale of Glamorgan	2,578
Wrexham Maelor	3,488
Ynys Mon	1,634
Wales Total	80,583

[1] Excludes right to buy sales from New Towns.

Urban Motorways

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total mileage of urban motorway in each urban area of Wales *(a)* already constructed and in operation, *(b)* under construction at present and *(c)* planned for the future.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The only length of motorway in Wales fitting this definition is the 1·5 mile M4 Port Talbot bypass in West Glamorgan. No additional urban motorways are either under construction or planned.

Official Visits

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to his Department of his visit to Fishguard and west Wales on 1 May.

Mr. David Hunt: On Wednesday 1 May 1991, I was received by the mayor of Fishguard and Goodwick town council at the town hall Fishguard where I was introduced to county, district, and local representatives.

I was then taken on a tour of Fishguard and Goodwick area by coach with the town clerk, Mr. Harold Rees, including a visit to the Fishguard factory of Slimma (Wales) Limited.

At a formal meeting later in the town hall I received presentations from the following speakers:

Mr. C. B. Fenemore—Route Director, Sealink Stenna, Fishguard harbour.
Mr. A. Daniels—Executive Director, Welsh Development Agency.
Mr. D. K. Jones—County Engineer and Surveyor, Dyfed County Council.
Mr. R. Anderson—Planning Officer, Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council.
Chief Inspector Horne—Dyfed Powys police.
Councillor W. Lloyd Evans—County/District/Town Council.
Mrs. M. Griffiths—Chairman, Fishguard and Goodwick Chamber of Trade.
Councillor A. Allison—District/Town Council.
Councillor B. Colnet—Fishguard and Goodwick Town Council.
Councilor D. Davies—District/Town Council.
Mr. Geraint Howells—MP, Ceredigion and North Pembrokeshire.

At the conclusion of the meeting, I visited Fishguard harbour and attended lunch aboard the Stenna Felicity hosted by Sealink Stenna. During the afternoon I had meetings with local NFU and FUW representatives, Carningli rural initiative, the Fishguard music festival, the spirit of youth festival, Gwyl Gwaun, the chamber of trade, including political meetings at Fishguard Bay hotel. As soon as the cost of the visit to the Welsh Office is known, I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mumbles (Development)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will inform Swansea city council and other interested parties of which procedures he has decided to adopt in relation to his determination of the Bright and Pepper/Fairclough development at Mumbles, Swansea.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* I shall announce the procedures as soon as I am content that the environmental assessment submitted by the applicants is complete.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to inform Swansea city council and other interested parties of the procedures which are to be followed in relation to the environmental impact study by *(a)* the developer, Bright and Pepper/Fairclough, and *(b)* the independent consultants appointed by Swansea city council to ensure that all information necessary to determine the application for development at Mumbles, Swansea, is available to him.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* My officials are scrutinising the environmental statement and supplementary information submitted by the developers and others. Should the environment information provided be considered inadequate to complete a full assessment, the developers will be required to supply further information under regulation 20 of the Town and County Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988. In this event, Swansea city council and the other statutory consultees will be informed.

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishment (Cardiff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those occasions since 1979 on which incidents have occured at AWE, Cardiff, involving a release of argon gas contaminated with beryllium powder into the atmosphere.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There have been no such occurrences.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the standard procedure to be

followed at AWE, Cardiff if the steel vessel containing beryllium powder were to burst within the furnace under pressure; whether that standard procedure has been altered during the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It would not be in the national interest to give details of AWE Cardiff's processing operations. However, during the site's many years of work with beryllium the most stringent health and safety procedures have been developed including careful control and monitoring. In the event of an abnormal occurrence the systems are designed to safeguard the work force, the public and the environment against potential hazard.

Gulf War

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many under-18s were injured or killed whilst serving in the armed forces during the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: According to our records, no service personnel under 18 years of age were injured during hostilities in the Gulf, but one soldier aged 17 was killed.

Premature Voluntary Release

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the latest figures for the rate of premature voluntary release in *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest premature voluntary release—PVR—annual exist rates are for the year to 31 March 1991 and are given in the table.

	Percentage rate
Officers	
RN/RM	3·24
Army	4·19
RAF	2·31
Service men	
RN	6·21
RM	6·42
Army	2·83
RAF	4·22

PVR figures for females are not currently available, but are being collated for future publication. The figures in the table therefore relate to males only.

Army Helicopters

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make further resources available to improve the defence capability of Army helicopters in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The defensive capabilities of Army helicopters are kept under review.

Schools (Efficiency Exercise)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been awarded under the Ministry of Defence's efficiency exercise incentive scheme to private schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Grenadier Guards

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the three Grenadier guardsmen who lost their legs and sustained other injuries in the course of their duties on a live firing range in Canada in July 1989 have received the automatic payments to service men when they are invalided out of the service including a tax-free war pension, a tax-free service pension and a tax-free lump sum and terminal grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Only one of the guardsmen has been discharged from the Army. He was awarded an immediate service invaliding pension and terminal grant by the Ministry of Defence. A war disablement pension, which is administered by the Department of Social Security and is payable following discharge from the armed forces only where a disability is due to or aggravated by military service, has been awarded at the 100 per cent. rate and a payment issued. This is tax free. As a result, his service invaliding pension, which has been in issue from the date of discharge, has been converted to a higher, tax-free, service attributable pension. He has also been awarded an additional tax-free lump sum.

Armed Forces (Crown Proceedings) Act

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operation of the Armed Forces (Crown Proceedings) Act 1987.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 by the Armed Forces (Crown Proceedings) Act 1987, we have received 2,249 claims for compensation from members of the armed forces. A total of 271 claims have been settled at a cost of £3,433,414. Nine hundred and thirty seven claims have been repudiated and 1,041 are still under investigation.

Chieftain Tank

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific factors still remain to be settled before the decision on the replacement for Chieftain tanks.

Mr. Alan Clark: The hon. Member would not expect me to give details at this stage of a competition.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect consideration of the potential use of helicopter gunships is having on the timing of his announcement of the replacement for Chieftain tanks.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are considering all relevant factors before making a decision on the equipment for our future main battle tank fleet.

Service Men (Compensation)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government to ensure that compensation available to service personnel should be in line with awards by the courts to civilians in comparable cases.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where responsibility for paying compensation will rest in

the event of a member of Her Majesty's forces currently being provided to serve under contract to a private company, namely Royal Ordnance, for mine-clearance duties in Kuwait, suffering injury or death in the course of his duties; and whether he will ensure that such compensation will be no less favourable than that payable to a British civilian employed by a British company.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are still discussing the details of this deployment with Royal Ordnance, and appropriate compensation arrangements are one of the matters under consideration.

Live Ammunition (Training)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the practice adopted by the Army in training with live ammunition; and if he will state the number of serious injuries suffered in the last five years both in the United Kingdom and outside on such training exercises.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* Use of live ammunition in training exercises is covered by a variety of range, safety and weapon systems instructions.

A number of serious injuries arising from training using live ammunition is set out in the table:

Number of serious injuries caused by training with live ammunition

Year	*Number*
1986	16
1987	14
1988	23
1989	20
1990	12

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policy is adopted by his Department in compensating those service men seriously injured as a result of training where live ammunition is used; and if he will make a statement on how many cases remain outstanding in the past three years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* Since the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987 became law, service personnel have had the right to pursue common law claims for damages against the Crown for any injury they suffer which they believe to have been caused through a negligent act or omission on the part of the Ministry of Defence, its servants or agents. Such claims are considered on a strict legal liability basis. It is not possible to give the number of cases which involved training with live ammunition and where claims are still outstanding as statistics are not held in a manner that can show this.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the practice of using live ammunition in training exercises is being reviewed by the Army; and when it was last reviewed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* The regulations regarding the use of live ammunition in training exercises and range safety instructions are kept under constant review.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his official visit to the United States to promote Britain as a tourist destination.

Mr. Howard: The purpose of my visit was to lend support to the efforts of the British Tourist Authority and the tourism industry to impress upon north Americans that this is an ideal time to visit Britain. While I was in the United States I addressed the World Travel and Tourism Council, the only Government Minister from outside the United States to do so.

Strikes

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any proposals to change the procedures for calling strikes.

Mr. Howard: I have no proposals to announce at this stage, but the law on strikes is a matter which the Government keep under active review. Unlike the Labour party, we have no intention of changing the law to make striking easier.

Manual Workers

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average number of hours worked per week for people engaged in manual occupations, excluding overtime, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated from the labour force survey that the average basic usual hours worked per week by people in manual occupations, excluding overtime, was 35·6 hours in Great Britain in the spring of 1990.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his current estimate of the total of people employed in more than one job who are counted more than once in the employment statistics.

Mr. Jackson: Precise information on the number of people with more than one job included in the published work force in employment estimates is not available. However, the labour force survey estimated that 724,000 people held a second job as an employee in the spring of 1990.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: In March 1991 seasonally adjusted unemployment in the United Kingdom was 2,092,700, a fall of 26 per cent. since the June 1987 election.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds are included in the most recent unemployment statistics.

Mr. Jackson: In January 1991 the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom aged under 18 was 2,709.

Low Wages

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the number of workers employed at wage rates below 50 per cent. of the male median wage.

Mr. Forth: We estimate the number to be around 3 million.

Trade Unions (Sequestration)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any proposals to restrict the power of the courts to sequestrate union assets.

Mr. Forth: No. Sequestration is a penalty which may be imposed on any organisation which commits contempt of court. To restrict the powers of the court to sequestrate union assets would, therefore, be to give a special, and totally unjustifiable, privilege to trade unions.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils became operational in April.

Mr. Howard: Twenty-three training and enterprise councils became operational in April 1991 which brings the total of operational TECs up to seventy-four. The remaining eight TECs will be operational later this year.

Textiles and Clothing

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the textile and clothing industries about employment levels.

Mr. Jackson: Employment Ministers meet representatives of the textile and clothing industry from time to time, but there have been no recent discussions on this subject.

Retraining (Cumbria)

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to improve retraining schemes in Cumbria.

Mr. Howard: Cumbria training and enterprise council is now responsible for training schemes in Cumbria and is currently restructuring ET to meet local needs more effectively. It will be launching several new training packages today, including pre-recruitment training, short duration training and a training and recruitment package. This is an excellent initiative showing how TECs can provide an immediate and flexible response to the needs of their constituents.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many industrial tribunal cases have found in favour of the appellant during the past 12 months; and how much compensation has been paid.

Mr. Forth: In the year up to the end of March the industrial tribunals found for the applicant in 5,033 cases and awarded a total of £3,490,454 in compensation.

Community Employment

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the report from Full Employment United Kingdom recommending community employment for the unemployed in return for benefits after one year's unemployment.

Mr. Jackson: I am grateful to Full Employment United Kingdom for sending me a copy of its report which I read with interest. Constructive contributions to the discussion about the further development of our programmes and services for unemployed people are always to be welcomed.

Restart Courses

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements exist to enable benefit claimants who have been unemployed for over two years and who are in part-time employment to attend compulsory restart courses.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Jobs

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs he expects to be created in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department does not offer forecasts of employment.

Employment Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the total number of ET training agents who have received approval for *(a)* each of the first five criteria and *(b)* each of the last four criteria set out in approved training organisation process;

(2) what is *(a)* the total number of ET training agents, *(b)* the total number of ET training managers, *(c)* the total number of ET training agents awarded approved training organisation status by 31 March and *(d)* the total number of ET training managers awarded approved training organisation status by 31 March;

(3) what is the total number of ET training managers who have received approval for *(a)* each of the first five criteria and *(b)* each of last four criteria set out in the approved training organisation process.

Mr. Jackson: In April 1990 the nine criteria considered in awarding approved training organisation status to ET training providers were consolidated into seven which cover the same ground. The total number of ET training agents and training managers is not available, nor is separate information for training agents and training managers covered by the approved training organisation process. A total of 880 of those ET training agents and training managers who commenced on 5 September 1988 were still contracted by the Department of Employment or by training and enterprise councils to deliver employment training on 31 March 1991. By that date all had received approval for each of the first four criteria and 809—92 per cent.—also for the last three criteria and therefore for approved training organisation status.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether those released from prison or young offender institutions are eligible for employment training in Bradford; and what assessment he has made of the likely implications of alternative policies in this area.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* Persons released from prison or young offender institutions who are 18 or over and under 60 are eligible for employment training if, at the time of seeking entry, they have accumulated 26 weeks of qualifying time spent either in unemployment or in custody or both. In addition, such persons can be eligible for fast entry into employment training if they have special training needs associated with disability, literacy, numeracy and language difficulty or if they qualify as skill shortage or enterprise entrants or labour market returners. A proportion of persons released from prison or from young offender institutions who are eligible for employment training are also covered by the Government's guarantee and aim. Eligibility for employment training is not defined or limited by location within Great Britain. There is no intention to apply alternative eligibility arrangements in Bradford and no assessment of other possibilities has been made.

Training Investment

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average invested per capita for trainees on courses organised by the training and enterprise councils; and what are the comparable figures for training schemes in West Germany.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 May 1991

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Overseas Development Administration on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received on 25 April from my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to privatise any activities of the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no proposals to privatise any activities of the Overseas Development Administration.

Ethiopian Relief Organisation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has given, or proposes to give, assistance directly to the Ethiopian Relief Organisation after the cancellation of the joint relief partnership scheme by the Ethiopian central Government.

Mrs. Chalker: The joint relief partnership—JRP—has not been cancelled. Latest reports indicate that the JRP continues to operate the southern line relief supply route satisfactorily. We are providing assistance through the southern line and in other ways. I have no plans at present to give assistance directly to the Ethiopian Relief Organisation.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Balance of Payments

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the relationship between the balance of payments cost of an increase in overseas aid and the domestic balance of taxation and net public spending.

Mr. Mellor: Overseas aid in the form of cash grants counts as a transfer debit in the invisible trade balance of the current account. An increase in such aid would therefore reduce the surplus on invisibles and so increase the current account deficit. It would count as public expenditure. To the extent to which it added to the planning total, it would need to be financed from general taxation.

Household Incomes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing gross rates as a percentage of equivalised disposable income for each category and each year itemised in table R of the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends"; and if he will add the average for all households in each tenure type;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing gross rates as a percentage of equivalised disposable income for each category and each year itemised in table Q of the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends"; and if he will add the average for all households in each household type;

(3) what is his estimate of the gross and net council tax payable as a percentage of household equivalised disposable incomes by decile groups as defined in the article on household income in the March issue of "Economic Trends", together with the corresponding figures for rates in 1988.

Mr. Mellor: It is not meaningful to compare unequivalised gross rates with equivalised values of income.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the numbers of households in each of the lowest two quintiles in table 3 appendix 1 of the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends", receiving a rate rebate of *(a)* 100 per cent. and *(b)* 50 to 99 per cent. and the numbers receiving combined housing benefit/rate relief in excess of rates.

Mr. Maples: The figures are as follows:

1988 Quintile groups of equivalised disposable income

	Number of households	
Percentage of domestic rates	*Bottom*	*2nd*
Rate rebates		
1. 100 per cent.	68	53
2. 50 to 99 per cent.	344	197
3. 0 to 49 per cent.	1,041	1,203
	1,453	1,453
Households where total of rate rebate and rent rebate/allowance is in excess of domestic rates	601	489

Note: Care should be taken in the interpretation of these figures, which are subject to sampling error, and the accuracy of reporting by households, in the Family Expenditure Survey which is the source of the data. Rate rebates may not always relate to the same time period as the reported income.
Source: Central Statistical Office.

The 100 per cent. figures include any cases where reported rebates exceed the domestic rates.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table, further to the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends", showing the increase in real disposable incomes since 1979 of the top and bottom deciles of households and the increases in the percentage of real disposable incomes taken by gross rates in each case.

Mr. Mellor: The analysis behind the article on household incomes has not been designed to give reliable estimates of increases in absolute income levels between two years. The remaining information is as follows.

Gross rates as percentage of disposable income in: 1979 and 1988

	Decile group of households ranked by equivalised disposable income		*All households*
Per cent.	*Bottom*	*Top*	
1979	9	3	4
1988	15	3	5

Note: Rate rebates will significantly reduce the burden of gross rates for lower income households.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each column in each table in the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends" the average amount of tax relief in total and per recipient.

Mr. Mellor: The information could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

However, the average amount of some forms of tax relief—relief at source on mortgage interest under the MIRAS system and life assurance premiums—is given for quintile and decile groups of households for 1988 in tables 3 and 4 of appendix 1 of the article in March's "Economic Trends".

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for each of the decile groups in table 2 of appendix 3 to the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends", the estimated gross amount of council tax payable compared to the gross rate, together with the corresponding tax rebate.

Mr. Mellor: Estimates of council tax are not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the numbers of households in each decile of table 2, appendix 3 of the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends" that received rate rebates or housing benefit equal to *(a)* 100 per cent. and *(b)* 50-99 per cent. of rates.

Mr. Maples: The figures are as follows:

	Decile groups of unadjusted disposable income										
1988 Number of households	*Bottom*	*2nd*	*3rd*	*4th*	*5th*	*6th*	*7th*	*8th*	*9th*	*Top*	*All households*
Total rate rebate and rent rebate allowance, as a percentage of domestic rates:											
100 per cent. or more	301	392	267	126	60	34	19	14	6	2	1,221
50 to 99 per cent.	107	59	42	30	18	12	12	4	2	2	288
0 to 49 per cent.	318	276	418	570	649	680	696	708	719	722	5,756
Total	726	727	727	726	727	726	727	726	727	726	7,265

Note: Care should be taken in the interpretation of these figures, which are subject to sampling error, and the accuracy of reporting by households, in the Family Expenditure Survey which is the source of the data. Rate rebates may not always relate to the same time period as the reported income. Some high income households may contain low income benefit units entitled to rebates, for example lodgers.
Source: Central Statistical Office.

Vote Bundle

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the amount charged for the full Vote bundle in each Session of Parliament for 1980-81 to date in cash prices and at 1990-91 prices; and if he will state the amounts charged during the current Session, its estimated cost and method of calculation.

Mr. Maples: The cost of taking one copy of the Vote bundle throughout each Session of Parliament since 1980-81 is as follows:

Session	*Prices charged*	*Prices charged uplifted to 1991 prices*
	£	£
1980-81	1,757	3,221
1981-82	2,113	3,510
1982-83[1]	1,509	2,396
1983-84[2]	3,039	4,586
1984-85	2,738	3,895
1985-86	2,885	3,937
1986-87[1]	1,569	2,058
1987-88[2]	4,664	5,913
1988-89	4,128	4,852
1989-90	4,304	4,680
1990-91[3]	3,800	3,800

[1] 6 month Session due to General Election.
[2] 17 month Session.
[3] Estimated.

Customers are currently charged on the basis of a page price which is set to recover the relatively fixed costs of maintaining a dedicated printing facility, plus a contribution towards central costs and HMSO's financial targets, from the pages produced, which vary with the level of parliamentary activity.

Council Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each quintile group of households in the family expenditure survey ranked by the gross amount of council tax payable the average (i) unadjusted disposable income, (ii) equivalised disposable income, (iii) number of households qualifying for relief and (iv) the amount of relief per qualifying household;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each quintile group within each household type in table 5, appendix 1 of the article on household incomes in the March issue of "Economic Trends", his estimate of the gross council tax to replace gross rates, together with his estimate of the average amount of rebate.

Mr. Maples: Estimates of council tax cannot be made from the data available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average increase in the amount payable by *(a)* council tenants and *(b)* other householders under the council tax over rates in 1979-80 and 1989-90; and if he will provide corresponding figures for each region.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply.
The information requested is not available.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Department for National Savings on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Figures for the years 1981-82 to 1991-92 are as follows. No breakdown by advertising medium is available for the years 1981-82 to 1983-84 and no total figures prior to 1981.

£000s

	TV Advertising	Press Advertising	Radio	Outdoor Posters	Point-of sale etc.	Total spend
1991-92	[1]5,500	[1]3,500	—	—	[1]1,826	[1]10,826
1990-91	5,242	4,226	—	—	1,412	10,880
1989-90	5,813	4,842	—	—	642	11,297
1988-89	5,389	4,745	—	1,063	3,090	14,287
1987-88	6,575	4,029	—	1,705	660	12,969
1986-87	5,145	7,706	—	2,104	3,518	18,473
1985-86	1,727	6,197	—	1,847	1,936	11,707
1984-85	1,998	6,021	—	1,728	2,419	12,166
1983-84	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,693
1982-83	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,479
1981-82	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,279

[1] estimated

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Inland Revenue on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: Information relating to the financial years 1979-80 to 1985-86 inclusive is not readily available and cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost. The spend on advertising, omitting staff and accommodation-related costs, for the remaining years is as follows:

£ thousand

	Television	Radio	Newspaper	Other promotional
1986-87	0	0	15	300
1987-88	0	0	15	350
1988-89	0	0	20	250
1989-90	0	0	30	400
1990-91[1]	4,376	0	2,155	692
1991-92[2]	0	0	20	300

[1] Forecast outturn
[2] Budget

The figures for 1990-91 include expenditure of £6·95 million on an advertising campaign to increase public awareness of the new arrangements for non-taxpayers to register for payment of bank and building society interest without deduction of income tax.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has not used television, radio or newspaper advertising for promotional purposes. The information available on other promotional material is as follows:

	Estimate expenditure £
1984-1985	21,000
1985-1986	29,000
1986-1987	28,000
1987-1988	29,000
1988-1989	47,000
1989-1990	31,000
1990-1991	44,000
1991-1992	54,000

The figures do not include recruitment advertising. The figures for 1979-84 are not available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by Her Majesty's Stationery Office on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: HMSO has not used television or radio advertising. Expenditure on advertising in newspapers and journals and on other promotional material for each financial year was:

Year	Advertising in Newspapers and Journals[1] £000	Other promotional material £000
1983-84	42	151
1984-85	45	125
1985-86	69	191
1986-87	61	160

Year	Advertising in Newspapers and Journal[1] £000	Other promotional material £000
1987-88	83	172
1988[2]	89	142
1989	[3]1,027	563
1990	406	658

[1] Details of expenditure on newspaper advertising as opposed to journal advertising are not available.
[2] HMSO changed its financial year from the fiscal to the calendar in 1988 (9 months).
[3] Includes expenditure on a major campaign to launch new health and safety posters.

Figures for the years 1979-80 to 1982-83 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The comparable budgeted figures for 1991 are £539,000 and £589,000 respectively.

The greater part of the expenditure is incurred in publicising publications and HMSO would normally expect to recover the costs through sales.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Department for National Savings on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Figures for the years 1981-82 to 1991-92 are as follows. No breakdown by advertising medium is available for the years 1981-82 to 1983-84 and no total figures prior to 1981.

£ thousands

	Television advertising	Press advertising	Radio	Outdoor posters	Point-of sale etc.	Total spend
1991-92	[1]5,500	[1]3,500	—	—	[1]1,826	[1]10,826
1990-91	5,242	4,226	—	—	1,412	10,880
1989-90	5,813	4,842	—	—	642	11,297
1988-89	5,389	4,745	—	1,063	3,090	14,287
1987-88	6,575	4,029	—	1,705	660	12,969
1986-87	5,145	7,706	—	2,104	3,518	18,473
1985-86	1,727	6,197	—	1,847	1,936	11,707
1984-85	1,998	6,021	—	1,728	2,419	12,166
1983-84	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,693
1982-83	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,479
1981-82	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,279

[1] Estimated

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to privatise any activities of the Department for National Savings.

Mr. Maples: None.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to privatise any activities of Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In common with other Departments, Customs and Excise carries out a continuing programme of market testing reviews of its activities. Where market testing identifies areas where value for money could be improved by contracting out work to the private sector, the feasibility of doing so will be examined.

Oil and Gas

Mr. Doran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount paid in *(a)* petroleum revenue tax, *(b)* royalties and *(c)* corporation tax arising out of oil and gas operations in the United Kingdom continental shelf in each year since 1979; and what is his estimate of the total amount of each tax to be paid in fiscal year 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: The information required (in £ millions) is contained in the table:

Fiscal Year	[1]Petroleum Revenue Tax	Royalties	[2]Corporation Tax
1979-80	1,435	628	250
1980-81	2,410	992	341
1981-82	4,415	1,396	681
1982-83	5,669	1,632	521
1983-84	6,017	1,904	877
1984-85	7,177	2,426	2,432
1985-86	6,375	2,057	2,916
1986-87	1,188	919	2,676
1987-88	2,296	1,024	1,298
1988-89	1,371	602	1,210
1989-90	1,050	575	768
1990-91	866	606	849
1991-92[3]	0	500	900

[1] Including supplementary petroleum duty in 1981-82 and 1982-83.
[2] Before ACT set-off.
[3] Forecast.

Premium Bonds

Sir Peter Blaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government with regard to the reinvestment of £50 prizes won under the premium bond scheme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have decided that winners of £50 prizes should be permitted to reinvest them in additional bonds if they so wish. Amendments to the regulations to effect this change will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Civil Research and Development

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the comparative figures for expenditure on civil research and development, as a percentage of their gross

national product, of the United Kingdom, Canada, Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden, for each year since 1974.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* Separate data for civil R and D expenditure by industry in the United Kingdom were collected for the first time in 1989. Provisional figures indicate that total civil R and D expenditure from all sources in 1989 represented 1·7 per cent. of gross domestic product. Standard international comparisons of R and D expenditure are usually given in terms of gross domestic product and not gross national product.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *437-38*, if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order of central administration expenditure on education per secondary pupil per year, starting with the highest spending authority.

Mr. Fallon: Expenditure for central administration is collected only as a single figure for all education services. That figure is not allocated to individual sectors of the education service, so expenditure attributable to a single sector such as secondary schools is not available.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *437-38*, if he will list all education authorities in England in rank order of total combined expenditure per secondary pupil per year on school meals, central administration, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

Mr. Fallon: Expenditure figures for the central services identified in the question are collected only as single totals for all education services. The figures are not allocated to individual sectors of the education service, so expenditure attributable to a single sector such as secondary schools is not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what additional *(a)* loan sanction and *(b)* grant has been granted to Doncaster local education authority for education purposes for (i) the current financial year (ii) the last financial year and (iii) for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Fallon: Details of the annual capital guidelines—ACGs—and the educational grants made to Doncaster for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are set out in the table. Grants and ACGs for 1992-93 have not yet been determined.

£ thousands

	1990-91	*1991-92*
(a) Annual Capital Guidelines		
ACGs	860·0	375·0
(b) Grants		
VA capital allocations[1]	345·0	145·0
ESGs[2]	1,272·0	—
LEATGs[3]	1,417·0	—
GEST[4]	—	2,715·0
Travellers[5]	58·1	60·9
Section 11[6]	17·8	22·0

Notes:

[1] *The figures represent planned expenditure by the Governors of voluntary aided or special agreement schools. Grant is paid up to a maximum of 85 per cent on such expenditure.*

[2] *ESG—Education Support Grants.*

[3] *LEATGS—LEA Training Grants Scheme*

[4] *GEST—Grants in Education Support and Training. This incorporates the ESG and LEATGs schemes.*

[5] *The figures represent approved expenditure. Grant aid is paid at the rate of 75 per cent.*

[6] *Grant under Section 11 of the Local Government Act is administered by the Home Office. Grant is paid at the rate of 75 per cent. on approved salary costs. The figure for 1991-92 is a provisional estimate.*

Urban programme grant is allocated to local authorities for economic, environmental, social and housing projects. Doncaster received £2 million in each of 1990-91 and 1991-92. Detailed statistics are not available to isolate the education component from the total urban programme grant.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total amount of moneys that his Department has allocated to Doncaster local education authority for the maintenance and repair of school buildings for the current financial year; and what was the amount for the last financial year.

Mr. Fallon: The Government do not allocate to LEAs separately identified recurrent funds for repairs and maintenance: it is for each authority and, under local management, its schools, to determine what proportion of the total recurrent funds available to them to allocate for that purpose.

As far as capital works on school buildings is concerned, Doncaster local education authority has been given an education annual capital guideline—ACG—of £375,000 for 1991-92 to contribute towards capital spending in schools. The authority is free to spend its overall capital resources as it chooses, and can supplement its annual capital guidelines from capital receipts and other sources of funding, including its revenue budget. The LEA also received an allocation of £145,000 for projects at voluntary aided—VA—and special agreement—SA—schools.

For 1990-91 Doncaster received an ACG of £860,000 —of which £780,000 was for schools, and an allocation for VA and SA schools of £345,000.

Geography

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made concerning the unit costs of material, textbooks, samples, maps or other aids including films, videos or filmstrips, models, globes or other equipment required as capital and revenue expenditure in order to provide for the geography curriculum and programme of study specified in SI 1991, No. 678.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend had general regard to the resource implications of the attainment targets and programmes of study specified in the document attached to SI 1991, No. 678. However, it is

for each school to decide what, if any, additional equipment it requires to deliver the national curriculum. In 1991-92, grants will be available to support up to £15 million of expenditure by local education authorities on equipment for the national curriculum.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the amount of specialised space required by current school building regulations in respect of studies in geography consequent on the requirements of SI 1991, No. 678 in terms of room units or floor space, including storage space, per thousand pupils or similar ratio.

Mr. Eggar: The minimum teaching accommodation requirements set out in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 refer only to the overall area to be provided. The requirements do not specify space standards for particular subjects of the curriculum.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the relationship between the programme of study and attainment targets specified in his approved geography curriculum, as set out in SI 1991, No. 678, and the general certificate of secondary education in geography.

Mr. Eggar: Although GCSE courses in geography are currently unaffected, with effect from autumn 1994 all GCSE geography syllabuses will have to reflect the curriculum requirements outlined in SI 1991, No. 678.

Personal Achievement Records

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects each child in local education authority-supported schools to have a record of personal achievement; and what guidance he is offering to local education authorities.

Mr. Eggar: Regulations laid last summer require parents to be given reports on the achievements of all children in years 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 and sixth formers, and will extend progressively to cover all years by 1994. The accompanying circular 8/90, "Records of Achievement", offers guidance both on the legal framework and how it might be developed at schools' discretion. All secondary schools have in addition been encouraged to give all their school leavers a national record of achievement from this summer.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the numbers of places, total cost, and cost per place of places under the assisted places scheme at each school in Newcastle upon Tyne for each of the last five years.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is given in the tables, but figures in respect of the academic years prior to 1988-89 are not readily available. The Church high school joined the assisted places scheme from the start of the 1989-90 academic year.

Table 1
Numbers of assisted places in each academic year

School name	Academic year 1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
La Sagesse Convent High School	144	139	139
Royal Grammar School	290	271	254
Dame Allan's Boys' School	133	121	118
Dame Allan's Girls' School	125	131	134
Central Newcastle High School	[1]—	117	107
Newcastle Upon Tyne Church High School	[1]—	5	10

[1] Not available.

Table 2
Total cost in each academic year

School name	Academic year 1988-89 (£)	1989-90 (£)	1990-91 (£)
La Sagesse Convent School	249,155	264,765	269,981
Royal Grammar School	369,073	361,831	384,909
Dame Allan's Boys' School	171,979	173,605	179,676
Dame Allan's Girls' School	197,590	217,790	247,731
Central Newcastle High School	[1]—	178,307	193,348
Newcastle upon Tyne Church High School	[1]—	10,017	20,719

[1] Not available.

Table 3
Cost per place in each academic year

School name	Academic year 1988-89 (£)	1989-90 (£)	1990-91 (£)
La Sagesse Convent School	1,730	1,905	1,942
Royal Grammar School	1,273	1,335	1,515
Dame Allan's Boys' School	1,293	1,435	1,523
Dame Allan's Girls' School	1,581	1,663	1,849
Central Newcastle High School	[1]—	1,524	1,807
Newcastle upon Tyne Church High School	[1]—	2,003	2,072

[1] Not available.

Note: The figures for academic year 1990-91 are the latest estimated costs. Final information will not be available until the schools submit their final claims.

Access Courses

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on how many access courses there are in the United Kingdom; what percentage of men and women take part in these courses; and if he will give a breakdown of the percentage of men and women by region.

Mr. Alan Howarth: A survey published by the educational counselling and credit transfer information service listed 522 access courses in England in 1989. Based on information from the "Further Education Statistical Record", 34 per cent. of students enrolled on access courses in England at Novembver 1989 were men and 66 per cent. were women. Percentages by region are:

	Per cent. Men	Per cent. Women
North	34	66
Yorks/Humberside	32	68
North West	32	68
East Midlands	47	53
West Midlands	33	67
East Anglia	44	56
Greater London	36	64
Other South East	24	76
South West	34	66

Information about access courses in the rest of the United Kingdom is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales.

Mathematics and Science

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on the review of the attainment targets and programmes of study for mathematics and science in the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Jointly with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, I am today publishing statutory proposals for new orders setting out the attainment targets and programmes of study for mathematics and science in the national curriculum. Our purpose is to make the assessment of these subjects more manageable for teachers and others, and to make reports on pupils' achievement in them easier for parents to understand. The effect of our proposals is to reduce the number of attainment targets in each subject to five. Within the attainment targets the number of statements of attainment will also be reduced, by slightly more than half. Our proposals will not change in substance the content of the curriculum for these subjects. I have today asked the National Curriculum Council in England to carry out consultations on the proposals, and comments should be sent to the council by 19 July. My right hon. Friend will initiate consultations in Wales. A copy of the published proposals has been placed in the Library of the House.

I intend that the new structure of attainment targets should be in place in time for the 1992-93 school year, and have decided that it would be right to consolidate their introduction with the first statutory assessments of 14-year-olds in these subjects, which will now take place in summer 1993. In preparation for those statutory assessments, I have invited the School Examinations and Assessment Council to co-ordinate a non-statutory pilot assessment of 14-year-olds against the revised attainment targets in 1992. The statutory assessment of seven-year-olds is already under way this year, and I think it right to continue with that assessment against the existing attainment targets in 1992, switching to the new structure in 1993.

Teacher Training

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the postgraduate certificate of education and B.Ed teacher education and training courses presently operating under temporary approval.

Mr. Fallon *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* The PGCE and B.Ed courses presently operating under temporary approval are listed in the table. The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education—CATE—intends to complete its scrutiny of these courses and make its recommendations to the Secretary of State by the end of July.

Institution	*Course*
BEd Courses	
Two-year	
Sheffield City Polytechnic	Primary and Secondary
La Sainte Union CHE	Primary
Edge Hill CHE	Primary
Hatfield Polytechnic	Primary
Leeds Polytechnic	Primary
Thames Polytechnic	Secondary
Wolverhampton Polytechnic	Secondary
Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic	Secondary
Birmingham Polytechnic	Secondary
Manchester Polytechnic	Secondary
Gwent CHE	Secondary
Crewe and Alsager CHE	Secondary
Middlesex Polytechnic	Secondary
Four-year	
Derbyshire CHE	Primary
La Sainte Union CHE	Primary
Bath CHE	Primary and Secondary
Crewe and Alsager CHE	Primary and Secondary
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	Primary and Secondary
Liverpool Polytechnic	Secondary
Middlesex Polytechnic	Secondary
Charlotte Mason College	Secondary
PGCE Courses	
Two-year	
Bradford Community College	Primary (P/T)
Leeds University	Secondary (P/T)
Southampton University	Secondary
King's College, London	Secondary (P/T)
Oxford University	Secondary (ATS)

Institution	*Course*
Bath CHE	Secondary (P/T)
Liverpool University	Secondary (P/T)
Exeter University	Secondary (ATS)
Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic	Secondary
Manchester Polytechnic	Primary and Secondary (ATS)
West Sussex IHE	Primary and Secondary (ATS)
Leeds Polytechnic	Primary (ATS)
York University	Secondary (ATS)
College of St. Mark and St. John	Primary and Secondary (ATS)
Bristol Polytechnic	Secondary (ATS)
Thames Polytechnic	Secondary (ATS)
Bedford CHE	Primary (ATS)
Christchurch College	Secondary (ATS)
Hull University	Secondary (ATS)
Crewe and Alsager CHE	Primary (ATS)
Bath University	Secondary (ATS)
Reading University	Secondary (P/T)
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	Primary (ATS)
Liverpool IHE	Secondary (P/T)
Keele University	Secondary (P/T)
St. Martin's College, Lancaster	Primary (ATS)
College of St. Mark and St. John	Primary (ATS)
Leeds University	Secondary (ATS)
Nottingham University	Secondary (P/T)
Sheffield City Polytechnic	Secondary
Roehampton IHE	Primary and Secondary (ATS)
Polytechnic of the South West	Primary (ATS)
Birmingham University	Secondary (P/T)
Polytechnic of North London	Primary (ATS)
One-year	
St. Martin's College, Lancaster	Secondary
Bath CHE	Primary
Leicester University	Secondary
Nene College	Primary
Exeter University	Secondary
Oxford Polytechnic	Primary
University of Wales, College of Cardiff	Secondary
University of Cambridge	Primary and Secondary
Birmingham Polytechnic	Primary
Brighton Polytechnic	Primary
College of St. Mark and St. John	Primary
Warwick University	Primary and Secondary
University of Durham	Secondary
Polytechnic of the South West	Primary
Liverpool Polytechnic	Secondary
University College, Swansea	Primary and Secondary
Westminster College, Oxford	Primary
University of East Anglia	Secondary
Charlotte Mason College	Primary
University of Keele	Secondary
University of Sussex	Primary
La Sainte Union CHE	Primary
Newcastle University	Secondary
Southampton University	Secondary

Notes:
1. P/T denotes a part-time course.
2. ATS means that the course is offered within an articled teacher scheme.

Chief Inspector of Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out in detail the procedures for the forthcoming appointment of a new holder of the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, including the nature of the involvement of Ministers in the appointment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[pursuant to his reply, 4 March 1991, c. 42]:* Before proceeding with the choice of a permanent successor to the present senior chief inspector I wish to carry out a thorough internal review of the structure and role of Her Majesty's inspectorate. I see this review as a necessary consequence of my decision to remove further education and sixth-form colleges from local education control and of the decisions of a growing number of maintained schools to opt out from local authority control. I will explore all possible options for an inspectorate capable of delivering an effective system of quality control based on inspection for the evolving pattern of educational provision. The outcome could well be a very different job description for the head of the inspectorate. I have asked therefore the Civil Service Commissioners to take no further action with the open competition they have been organising to identify a new senior chief inspector. In the meantime it is important that HM inspectorate should be under sound and strong leadership when the present SCI retires at the end of August. I am therefore appointing an internal candidate as

SCI who will be well able to carry out the functions of the post until the review is complete and a new appointment can be made following a public competition.

TRANSPORT

Clapham Junction Railway Accident

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received a further progress report from British Rail on implementation of the recommendations of Sir Anthony Hidden's report on the Clapham junction railway accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Sir Bob Reid has submitted British Rail's third progress report to me, and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library. BR has continued to make progress on these recommendations, and all of those for BR or the British Transport police are either complete or have actions in hand. Some of the recommendations require long-term development. I welcome the report, which demonstrates BR's commitment to maintaining a very high standard of safety. Safety improvements under way include changes in working methods, improved training, new safety management systems and investment in new equipment.

Dry Cargo Ships

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has been given and what research has been carried out or commissioned by his Department on the safety implications for dry cargo ships of *(a)* fitting ships with structural monitoring systems, *(b)* the speed with which ships are loaded and *(c)* other technical and staffing considerations relating to safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has jointly funded with "Lloyd's Register of Shipping" the developments of the "black box" voyage data recorder. This equipment is presently being evaluated at sea. It embodies, among other things, features designed to monitor stress levels at critical locations of a vessel's structure. Stress levels may be monitored with this equipment during loading and unloading operations, and in addition recorded for analysis at a later date.

Research commissioned by the Department into the "Technology and Manning for Safe Ship Operations" in 1986 formed the reference work for a strategic policy committee, under the Merchant Navy Training Board, to develop a modular structure of qualifications based on standards to perform separate shipboard functions. These new initiatives on training and future manning models are referred to in "British Shipping: Challenges and Opportunities", which suggests a target date for their implementation of September 1992.

Explosives Train (Emergency Alert)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement in respect of an incident on the evening of 22 March when a train carrying explosives was involved in an emergency alert near Thirsk, Yorkshire.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that on 22 April British Rail's lineside equipment detected hot wheel bearings on a train at Thirsk. The fire brigade was called as a precautionary measure. The incident was not reported to the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate, but the inspectorate is making inquiries.

British Rail Investment

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, columns *348-49*, how much of the £1·4 billion will be invested in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* in new rolling stock, *(c)* on improvement of lines connecting the channel tunnel with Scotland and the north of England, *(d)* electrification of lines and *(e)* special measures for the protection of the environment both in Scotland and in England.

Mr. Freeman: Proposals for providing freight services north of London are currently being examined by British Rail as part of its £1·4 billion programme of investment to take advantage of the initial opening of the tunnel. Possible sites for a freight terminal in Strathclyde are being considered. No firm figures are therefore available for expenditure in Scotland. Spending of over £650 million is planned on new rolling stock for freight and inter-capital passenger services. A total of £21 million will be spent improving freight routes connecting the channel tunnel to Scotland and the north of England. On electrification, £43 million will be spent on the west London line and the line between Tonbridge and Redhill. Spending on environmental protection relating to work on existing lines cannot be separately identified.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. McLoughlin: The readily available information about appointments for which my right hon. and learned Friend is responsible is given in "Public Bodies 1990" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

A40, Ealing

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the precise nature of the work currently being undertaken on the central reservation of the A40 in the London borough of Ealing; when he expects it to be completed; what the final cost will be; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The work currently under way on the A40 Western avenue in the London borough of Ealing entails the repair and replacement of central reserve safety fencing and to bring it up to the latest departmental standards. At the same time, existing emergency crossover points are being closed permanently on road safety grounds and the street lighting is being improved.

Work is scheduled for completion by the middle of May at an estimated cost of £377,000.

HGVs (Carbon Dioxide)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the amount of carbon dioxide which may be emitted from the existing heavy goods vehicle fleet during its remaining lifetime.

Mr. Chope: The latest available figure is 28,000 tonnes per annum for 1988 and relates to total carbon dioxide emissions from all road vehicles. No breakdown of this figure between vehicle types is available. The remaining life of the existing heavy goods vehicle fleet depends on varying factors and cannot be predicted with accuracy.

Speed Limits

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received called for the lowering of the maximum speed limits on roads in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chope: I receive a substantial quantity of correspondence concerning national speed limits and their enforcement.

Motoring Offences

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of yellow box junctions in accident prevention; and if he has any plans to extend their use to pedestrian crossings.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* Yellow box markings were introduced in the Traffic Signs Regulations 1975 primarily as a means of speeding up traffic flow at junctions. At signal-controlled junctions their introduction led to marked reductions in injury accidents, particularly involving pedestrians.

There are no plans to extend their use to pedestrian crossings. At "zebra" crossings the yellow box would conflict with the zebra stripes. Yellow box markings used at "pelican" crossings would be likely to have little impact.

Pelican Crossings

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has any intention of reviewing the criteria for qualification for a pelican crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* It is for individual local highway authorities to decide whether a particular crossing is needed in the light of criteria published by the Department. These are to be reviewed further with the local authority associations later this year.

Eurofreight Terminal (Scotland)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his decision on the siting of Scotland's Eurofreight rail terminal.

Mr. Freeman: The siting of channel tunnel freight terminals is a commercial matter for British Rail. I understand that it is currently discussing possible locations in Strathclyde with local authorities and private sector developers and hopes to make an announcement this summer.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kurdish Refugees

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals there are to promote safety zones for Kurds presently on the Iran-Iraq border.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are continuing our policy of establishing safe havens in northern Iraq. We will assist with the most appropriate measures to meet the humanitarian needs of all Iraqi refugees as quickly and effectively as possible. We hope that the United Nations will soon be in a position to take over the operation.

Bangladesh

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps to safeguard minority interests and human rights in Bangladesh his Department has taken with reference to (1) the protection of tribal people in Chittagong hill tracts, (2) the protection of non-Muslim temples, churches and relics, (3) the exodus of Bengalese to India to escape harassment and (4) the Enemy Property Act.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Through our regular contacts with the Bangladesh Government, I know that they are well aware of the importance we attach to respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the individual appointments exluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Individual apopintments are scheduled to be made in 1991 and 1992 to the following bodies for which the diplomatic and aid wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are responsible:

Organisation and appointment	*1991*	*1992*	*Salary*	*Duration of appointment*
Imperial War Museum				
Members of Board of Trustees	1	—	—	7 years
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission				
Member	4	2	—	3 years
Commonwealth Institute				
(i) Director-General	1	—	C£45,000	5 years
(ii) Chairman of Board of Governors	1	—	—	3 years
(iii) Vice-Chairman	1	—	—	3 years

Organisation and appointment	*1991*	*1992*	*Salary*	*Duration of appointment*
(iv) Governor	6	3	—	3 years
(v) Scottish Member	—	1	—	3 years
Sightsavers				
Member of Executive Council	—	2	—	5 years
Wilton Park Academic Council				
(i) Chairman	—	1	—	3 years
(ii) Member of Council	—	11	—	3 years
Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for Purchase of Wine				
Chairman	—	1	—	5 years
Diplomatic Service Appeal Boards (2)				
(i) Chairman (1)	1	—	—	3 years
(ii) Chairman (2)	—	1	—	3 years
(iii) Member	—	6	—	3 years
British Council				
Member of Boards	1	—	—	5 years
Commonwealth Scholarship Fund				
Board Member	—	5	—	3 years
Advisory Committee on Economic and Social Resources Overseas				
Committee Member	1	10	—	3 years
Crown Agents				
Board Member	1	2	£5,320	3 years
Commonwealth Development Corporation				
(i) Chairman	—	1	£11,900	3 years
(ii) Deputy Chairman	1	—	£8,200	3 years
(iii) Board Member	5	2	£4,450	3 years
Institute of Development Studies				
Governor	—	5	—	Indefinite

Middle East

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to the middle east.

Mr. Hurd: I visited Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from 1 to 4 May. In addition to meetings with those Governments, I also had a discussion with the Foreign Minister of Yemen in Cairo on 2 May.

In Cairo I had useful talks withn President Mubarak, Foreign Minister Abdul Meguid and presidential adviser Osama Al Baz. We discussed regional issues, including the middle east peace process. Bilateral issues discussed included President Mubarak's forthcoming state visit. We agreed that there are now no significant differences in the British and Egyptian approach to the main problems of the middle east.

In Jordan I had discussions with King Hussein, the Crown Prince, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. Jordan is keen to play a helpful role in Mr. Baker's peace initiative and to rebuild relations with the west and her Gulf neighbours. I made clear our continuing friendship for Jordan and our wish to see Jordan resume its rightful position in the Arab world.

In Kuwait I saw the state of the country following liberation. I was shocked at the extent of the destruction by the Iraqis during their brutal occupation. Much remains to be done before Kuwait is functioning again as a prosperous society, and in this task of reconstruction Britain intends to take a full part. We discussed this co-operation in detail. My meetings with the Amir, the Crown Prince and the Foreign Minister covered a number of issues. I raised reports of human rights abuses following liberation and in particular the position of Palestinians in Kuwait. The Amir said that the Government would hold to their commitment to hold general elections in 1992. He emphasised his concern at Iraq's failure to return a large number of Kuwaitis detained in Iraq and property removed from Kuwait during the occupation.

In Saudi Arabia my discussions with the King and his Minister of Foreign Affairs revealed a close identity of view. The Saudis remain concerned to support the middle east peace process and to keep up the pressure on the Iraqi Government to fulfill their commitments to the United Nations. I explained the background to our efforts to provide humanitarian help to Iraqi refugees and displaced persons and our view that Iraq could not be allowed to rejoin the family of nations while Saddam Hussein remained in power in Baghdad.

In all four countries there was appreciation for Britain's continuing role in the middle east whether in pressing for a settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions or in underpinning new arrangements for ensuring the security of the Gulf.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Replica Guns

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what restrictions exist on the sale of replica guns by mail order;

(2) if he will introduce measures to curb the sale of replica guns;

(3) what restrictions exist on the sale of replica guns through retail outlets.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Firearms Act 1982 the sale and possession of replica firearms which can be readily converted to fire live ammunition are subject to the same stringent controls as those imposed on real firearms under the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1988. Where such a replica is

sold, whether by mail order or through a retail outlet, the purchaser must produce a firearm certificate as proof of authorisation to acquire the weapon concerned. The possession of any imitation firearm, whether readily convertible or not, with intent to commit an offence or resist arrest is an offence for which the maximum penalty is life imprisonment. We have no plans to control the sale of replica firearms that cannot be readily converted to fire live ammunition.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received criticising the easy availability of replica guns.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) on 7 March at column *269* since when he has written to the Home Office on this matter. No other such representations have recently been received.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there have been any recent changes in the level of offences involving the use of replica guns.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Figures for the last four years for which statistics are available are shown in the table:

Year	*Number of offences*
1989	235
1988	185
1987	201
1986	195

Warwickshire Police

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what comments he has received from Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary on the effect of the Government's proposed poll tax capping of Warwickshire county council on policing within the county.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary will report on the Warwickshire constabulary following his inspection of the force on 7 to 9 May. No specific comments have been received on the effect of the proposed cap.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the chief constable of Warwickshire on the likely impact of the Government's proposed poll tax capping of Warwickshire county council.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 3 April his proposals for capping a number of local authorities, including Warwickshire.

Crime Statistics

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish a table showing the level of recorded crimes in the categories *(a)* burglaries, *(b)* crimes of violence against the person and *(c)* property theft, including theft from vehicles, for each police authority in England in 1979, 1989 and 1990;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the level of recorded crimes in the categories *(a)* burglaries, *(b)* crimes of violence against the person and *(c)* property theft, including theft from vehicles, for each police authority in Wales in 1979, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. John Patten: Information on notifiable offences of violence against the person, burglary and theft and handling stolen goods by police force area is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". The information is given in table 32 of the issue for 1979 and table 2.5 for 1989. Copies of these publications are available in the Library. Corresponding figures for 1990 have also been placed in the Library.

Unexplained Deaths

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of time between each notification of an unexplained death and the determination of cause of death by a coroner in each of the past two years, for *(a)* England and *(b)* Medway.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that this information is not collected centrally. I understand that coroners endeavour to hold inquests as soon as practicable following the death, but sometimes delays are experienced because of the need to wait for witnesses or other evidence.

Poland

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to abolish the visa requirement for Polish citizens wishing to visit the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to abolish the visa requirement for Polish nationals.

Parliamentary Nomination Forms (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects his Department to be able to supply Doncaster metropolitan borough council with parliamentary candidates" nomination forms.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Nomination papers for candidates at parliamentary elections are not supplied by the Home Office. I understand that the acting returning officer in Doncaster obtains supplies from Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Animals (Research)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the medical establishments to which he has given a licence to acquire animals which have not been bred specifically for the purpose of research.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is not our practice to give details of individual scientific procedure establishments.

Life Imprisonment

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people sentenced to life imprisonment were released (i) on parole and (ii) on life licence in the last 10 years; and how many in each category of those released have been convicted of a further homicide or serious violent offence.

Mr. John Patten: A person sentenced to life imprisonment can be released from prison only on life licence.

The table gives figures for the number of persons first released on life licence for the years 1979-88 and how many of these were convicted of a "grave" offence since release, by the end of 1988.

Year of first release	*Number[1] released*	*Number reconvicted of 'grave'[2] offence by the end of 1988*	*Number reconvicted of homicide*	
		Total	*Of which Homicide*	*Serious violence*
1979	74	3	2	1
1980	48	3	1	2
1981	82	1	—	1
1982	107	5	1	4
1983	104	4	3	1
1984	68	2	—	2
1985	69	1	—	1
1986	48	3	—	3
1987	58	—	—	—
1988	70	—	—	—
1979-88	728	22	7	15

[1] Excluding those deported immediately on release.
[2] A 'grave' offence is an offence of homicide, serious wounding, rape, buggery, robbery, aggravated burglary and arson.

The reconviction information was obtained via the offenders' index. More information on the recalls and reconvictions of life licensees is published annually in a Home Office statistical bulletin "Reconvictions and recalls of life licensees and Mentally Disordered Offenders, England and Wales", the latest issue of which is in the Library.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons sentenced to life imprisonment have been released from prison in the last 10 years having served (i) less and (ii) more than the minimum term, if any, recommended by the sentencing trial judge.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: During the last 10 years seven prisoners have been released on life licence at an earlier date than that recommended by the trial judge, including two who were terminally ill and released on humanitarian grounds. In the same period six prisoners were released after they had served more than six months longer than the minimum period recommended by the trial judge.

Nationality Office

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in establishing a direct line at the Liverpool nationality office for hon. Members' inquiries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Inquiries should continue to be pursued through the existing telephone numbers in Lunar house. However, hon. Members will shortly be advised of new arrangements for making inquiries on nationality matters when the transfer of work from Croydon to Liverpool is complete.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will describe the reasons for the Government's opposition to the European Commission's proposal for a data protection directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As indicated in the answer to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 22 February 1991, at column *278*, the Government wish to see all Community states ratify the European convention on data protection and introduce national implementing legislation. We are not yet convinced that provisions of the draft directive which go beyond the convention are necessary or desirable.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many replies to his consultation exercise in relation to the proposal by the European Commission for a data protection directive he has received; how many come from organisations representing data users and how many from organisations representing data subjects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received written comments on the draft directive from 56 organisations broadly representing data users' interests, and four from organisations broadly representing data subjects' interests. Negotiations on the draft directive have begun in Brussels, and the Government are considering their position in the light of the comments they have received.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to propose amendments to the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As indicated in my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member on 18 October 1990 at column *893*, legislation is unlikely before the European directive has been adopted.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give separate figures for the spending by the office of the Data Protection Registrar on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Data Protection Registrar was first appointed in September 1984. I understand that no significant promotional expenditure was incurred in the financial year 1984-85. Expenditure in the years 1985-86 to 1990-91 and the estimate for 1991-92 on fees paid for promotion were as follows:

	Advertising				Exhibitions
	TV	Radio	Newspaper	Other	
	£	£	£	£	£
1985-86	—	—	319,012	—	10,538
1986-87	—	—	156,912	—	22,143
1987-88	—	—	364,614	—	15,157
1988-89	—	—	448,603	—	11,383
1989-90	301,353	—	8,348	—	21,260
1990-91	198,380	—	2,125	2,500	21,101
1991-92	—	—	50,000	2,500	25,000

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to privatise any activities of the office of the Data Protection Registrar.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Data Protection Registrar is an independent authority appointed by the Crown to enforce the Data Protection Act 1984. I have no plans for changing his status. It is for the registrar to decide how best to carry out his specific statutory functions.

Prison Officers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by year for the last 10 years and for the current year to date *(a)* the number of prison officers found guilty of offences at their place of work, *(b)* the prison and *(c)* the offence.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The tables give details of prison officers found guilty of offences in criminal proceedings and of officers found guilty of disciplinary offences as a result of internal disciplinary proceedings. Table A contains a full breakdown for the past 10 years by establishment and by offence. Table B contains only those offences which were dealt with centrally, either by virtue of their intrinsic seriousness or because the officer appealed against the governor's findings. The majority of disciplinary offences are dealt with locally and no central record is kept. In view of the wide range of disciplinary offences, it is not practicable to provide a breakdown by individual offence.

Table A: Officers found guilty of criminal offences.

1981

Brixton—Officer convicted of assault on inmate.

1982

Brixton—Officer convicted of assault on inmate.

Kingston—Officer convicted of theft of meat from prison.

Ashford—Officer convicted of criminal deception (fraudulent expenses)

1983

Askham Grange—Officer convicted of false accounting.

Blundeston—Officer convicted of theft and falsifying accounts—took money from staff fund for disabled.

Oxford—Officer convicted of deception, attempted deception and forgery—submitted incorrect expenses claim.

1984

Swinfen Hall—Officer convicted of false accounting and obtaining money by deception—false mileage claim.

1985

Leicester—Officer convicted of deception (falsely claimed lodging allowance).

Bedford—Officer convicted of stealing money from incoming letter to an inmate.

1986

Leicester—Officer convicted of stealing cream and peas from prison kitchen.

Cardiff—Officer convicted of drugs offences involving an inmate.

Wandsworth—Officer convicted of forgery: altered a medical certificate and then submitted it to the Department.

1987

Grendon—Officer convicted of conspiracy to supply a Schedule B drug to a prisoner.

Liverpool—Officer convicted of possession of drugs with intent to supply to a prisoner.

Ford—Officer convicted of four offences of corruption (bringing alcohol, tobacco and other items into the prison).

Albany—Officer convicted of theft from officers' mess.

1988

Blundeston—Officer convicted of theft and false accounting as Treasurer of Officers' Club.

1989

Maidstone—Officer convicted of 2 counts of indecent assault on female member of staff.

Lincoln—Officer convicted of theft of meat from prison.

Coldingley—Officer convicted of theft of £1,000 from Officers' Club.

Table B: Officers found guilty of serious disciplinary offences (year of final disciplinary decision)

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Acklington	1	—	1	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Albany	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—
Aldington	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ashwell	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Aylesbury	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Bedford	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	2	—	—
Birmingham	—	2	5	2	9	1	—	—	—	1	—
Blundeston	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol	—	1	2	—	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Brixton	1	4	3	4	—	1	1	—	1	4	1
Bullwood Hall	—	—	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	—
Camp Hill	—	4	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	1
Canterbury	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	1	1
Cardiff	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Castington	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Channings Wood	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Chelmsford	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Coldingley	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Cookham Wood	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Dartmoor	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	2	—
Deerbolt	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Dorchester	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dover	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Drake Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	—	—
Eastwood Park	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Everthorpe	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Exeter	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	1	1	1	—
Feltham/Ashford	4	1	—	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Ford	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Frankland	—	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	—	—	—
Full Sutton	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Garth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—
Gartree	—	1	3	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Glen Parva	—	1	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—
Gloucester	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Grendon	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	1	—	—	—
Hatfield	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Havering	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Highpoint	—	—	—	—	3	1	2	1	1	—	—
Hindley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	—
Hollesley Bay	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—
Holloway	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—
Hull	—	—	1	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—
Huntercombe	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston	1	1	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	1	—
Latchmere	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Leeds	1	2	—	2	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Leicester	1	4	3	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	1
Lewes	—	—	—	1	3	2	—	1	—	—	—
Leyhill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Lincoln	2	1	—	—	—	3	2	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	—	—	2	2	3	4	—	1	—	—	—
Long Lartin	1	—	—	1	1	—	2	2	—	1	—
Lowdham Grange	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Low Newton	1	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maidstone	—	2	—	—	2	1	1	2	1	—	—
Manchester	—	—	—	2	—	—	4	2	2	—	—
New Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Northallerton	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Northeye	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Norwich	1	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Onley	1	—	1	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Oxford	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Parkhurst	—	—	1	2	1	1	—	4	1	1	—
Pentonville	1	—	1	—	2	—	1	4	1	1	—
Portland	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Preston	1	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pucklechurch	1	2	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Ranby	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Reading	—	3	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Risley	1	2	2	—	3	—	—	—	1	—	—
Rochester	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	1	—
Send	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Shepton Mallett	—	—	1	17	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Shrewsbury	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	2	—	1
Stafford	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	3	—
Stanford Hill	—	—	1	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Stocken	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Stoke Heath	—	2	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	—
Styal	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Sudbury/Foston Hall	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Swaleside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Swansea	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	—
Swinfen Hall	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	1	—
Thorn Cross	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	—
Thorp Arch	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
The Verne	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	3	—	—	—
Wakefield	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Wandsworth	3	2	1	—	—	3	1	2	1	1	—
Wayland	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Wellingborough	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Werrington	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Whatton	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Winchester	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—
Wormwood Scrubs	1	2	1	1	1	—	1	1	1	1	—
Wymott	—7	—	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

"Frances the Firefly"

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many copies of "Frances the Firefly" were produced for his Department by the Central Office of Information; what was the cost of (i) the production and (ii) the distribution of "Frances the Firefly"; who offered advice on the content of "Frances the Firefly"; and whether he intends to produce a sequel.

Mr. John Patten: The "Frances the Firefly" package consists of a story book and a five-minute video intended to warn small children of the dangers of playing with matches. To date 900,000 copies of the story book have been distributed, 97 per cent. of which were in response to requests. A total of 374 copies of the video have been sold and there have been 1,089 loans of the video through the central film library.

The production costs for the story book were £190,503 including the costs of development and reprints. The production costs of the video were £59,126 including £54,920 on development costs. The initial distribution costs of the video and story book were £14,728.

Advice on the content of the video and publication was provided internally by the Home Office fire and emergency planning department and the Home Office public relations branch, by the Central Office of Information and from a sample of primary school teachers in the Greater London area; and the style of presentation was also discussed with child psychologists.

It is intended to produce worksheets later this year to accompany the existing package. The character is capable of being used in future projects aimed at children, but no decision has yet been taken on a sequel.

Vagrancy

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to repeal the Vagrancy Act 1824.

Mr. John Patten: No. The Vagrancy Act 1824 has been much amended over the years and in its present form provides power to deal with a number of nuisances, including indecent exposure.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions and convictions under the Vagrancy Act 1824 occurred in 1989 and 1990; and what was the average cost of prosecution;

(2) how many prosecutions and convictions under the Vagrancy Act 1824 occurred in 1989 and 1990 for young people under the age of 18 years; and what was the average cost of prosecution for this age group.

Mr. John Patten: Information for 1990 is not yet available. Prosecutions and convictions for 1989 for all Vagrancy Act offences are shown in the table.

Category	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
All ages	3,482	2,839
Under 18	247	175

Prosecution costs are not available by reference to offence.

Missing People

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to establish a national database of missing persons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes. My right hon. Friend plans to introduce a national index of missing persons on the new police national computer.

Narayan Shankar

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a final decision on the future of Narayan Shankar (Ref. S680769), whose application for political asylum was made in August, 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The delay in dealing with applications for asylum is a result of the increase in the number of applications in the last two years. On 26 April my right hon. Friend announced a nearly fivefold increase in staff resources for asylum determination. Mr. Shankar's application is receiving attention and his representatives will be informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

Football Licensing Authority

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time inspectors are currently in post at the Football Licensing Authority, how many more (i) full-time and (ii) part-time inspectors it is planned to appoint; what stage has been reached in the training of these inspectors; and what timescale is envisaged for the completion of all Football Licensing Authority inspectors' training.

Mr. John Patten: Eight full-time ground safety inspectors are already in post, and one further full-time appointment is expected to be made shortly. No further appointments, either part time or full time, are currently proposed. The initial teacher training programme for the inspectors began on 1 May and will take about one month to complete.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to extend the remit of the Football Licensing Authority to cover all sports grounds designated under the Safety of Sports Ground Act 1975 and all grounds requiring safety certificates or licences under parts III and IV of the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sports Act 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No. The responsibilities of the Football Licensing Authority under the Football Spectators Act 1989 are limited to sports grounds at which designated football matches are played. We have no plans to extend the powers of the authority to other sports grounds.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the introduction of section 13 of the Football Spectators Act 1989.

Mr. John Patten: The Football Spectators Act 1989 (Commencement No. 3) Order 1991 (SI No. 1991/1071 (C 28)) was laid on 1 May, and will bring section 13 of the 1989 Act into force on 3 June 1991. Section 13 empowers

the Football Licensing Authority to keep under review the discharge by local authorities of their functions under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 in relation to sports grounds at which designated football matches are played; and subject to consultation with regulatory authorities, to direct local authorities to include terms and conditions in safety certificates. Section 13 also empowers the authority's inspectors to enter and inspect relevant sports grounds and to examine safety certificates and related records, and enables the authority to require local authorities to furnish it with information relating to the discharge of the functions which the Football Licensing Authority is empowered to keep under review.

Police Complaints Authority (Appointments)

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any new appointments have been made to the Police Complaints Authority.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have recently appointed two further members to the Police Complaints Authority. Mrs. Linda Cawsey will join the authority on 13 May and Mr. Mark Chapman on 10 June. Mrs. Cawsey was until recently a senior manager with BP International Ltd. while Mr. Chapman was formerly Her Majesty's ambassador to Iceland.

War Crimes

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what investigation he has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of partisans in southern France in 1945;

(2) what investigation he has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the massacre of the Russian officer corps or any of those murdered in Stalin's purges;

(3) what investigation he has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of Cossacks in Yugoslavia, Russia and Austria in 1945;

(4) what investigation he has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of Poles in the Warsaw uprising in 1944;

(5) what investigation he has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the murder of Germans in Berlin in 1945 by Russian soldiers;

(6) what investigation he has directed to attempt to identify persons resident in the United Kingdom who may have been involved in the massacre of Polish officers at Katyn.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* So far as the Government are aware, no allegations have been made—in the media, or to the Government, the police or anyone else—that persons resident in this country participated in any of these murders.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers' Visits

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister what are the guidelines for Ministers using Government expenses to undertake official visits which promote prospective candidates for the constituency visited.

The Prime Minister: As under previous Administrations, Ministers do not normally use official resources, such as transport, in connection with party business, but there may be circumstances which makes this necessary, for example, security or when official and party engagements are consecutive.

EMPLOYMENT

Race and Sex Discrimination

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases of breaches of the legislation on race and sex discrimination have the Employment Service referred to the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Redundancies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many redundancies there were in British companies in each year since 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The number of confirmed redundancies recorded in each of the years since 1987 is given in the table.

Confirmed redundancies

Year	*Number*
1987	144,135
1988	107,930
1989	116,766
1990	124,777

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make on quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Forth: The readily available information about the appointments for which I am responsible, a number of which fall to be made in 1991 and 1992, is given in "Public Bodies 1990" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to privatise any activities of the British Tourist Authority.

Mr. Forth: Following the completion of the Government's review of support for tourism, the authority announced on 6 December 1989 the privatisation or contracting out of certain of its activities. The authority will keep under review further possibilities for privatisation.

Training

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people on work-related Government training programmes are *(a)* men and *(b)* women on each programme; and what is the total percentage of (i) single women, (ii) married women and (iii) women with children on each programme.

Mr. Jackson: Information about the proportions of men and women on employment training and youth training is given in the following table. No information is available about the marital status of women or the number with children.

Proportions of men and women joining employment training and youth training April—September 1990

	Youth training Per cent.	*Employment training Per cent.*
Men	59	66
Women	41	34

Source: ATVOS/TFS.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of men and women for each occupational group of Government employment training programmes.

Mr. Jackson: The most recent available information is given in the tables.

Youth Training Scheme
Training occupational classification by men and women in training at 31 March 1990

	Men per cent.	*Women per cent.*
Administration and Clerical	32	68
Creative and Educational	64	36
Health and Community Care	7	93
Selling and Storage	43	57
Scientific	70	30
Catering and Food Preparation	56	44
Agriculture and Fishing	71	29
Transport Operations	86	14
Civil Engineering and Mining	97	3
Electrical and Electronic Engineering	96	4
Mechanical Engineering and Metal Processing	95	5
Motor Vehicle Repair	97	3
Non Metal Processing	76	24
Printing	85	15
Textiles	16	84
Other	66	34

Source: Spectrum.

Employment Training
Standard Occupational Classification by Men and Women leavers April-December 1990

	Men (per cent.)	*Women (per cent.)*
Corporate Managers and Administrators	70	30
Managers/Proprietors in Agriculture and Services	66	34
Professional Occupations	53	47
Science and Engineering Associate Professions	83	17
Health Associate Professions	42	58
Legal, Business, Social Welfare and Other Associate Professions	65	35
Literary, Artistic and Sports Professionals	69	31
Clerical Occupations	34	66
Secretarial Occupations	35	65
Skilled Construction	95	5
Skilled Engineering, Metal Machining Electrical and Electronic Trades	96	4
Metal Forming and Fabrication Trades	99	1
Vehicle Trades	96	4
Textiles, Garments and Related Trades	27	73
Printing, Woodworking, Food Preparation and Other Craft Occupations	91	9
Protective Service Occupations	91	9
Catering, Waiting Staff and Travel Attendants	66	34
Health and Related Occupations	26	74
Hair, Beauty and Other Personal Occupations	18	82
Buyers and Sales Representatives	77	23
Sales Assistants and Other Selling Occupations	54	46
Industrial Plant Operators/Fitters	87	13
Transport Operatives/Drivers	96	4
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing Occupations	84	16
Other Elementary Occupations	82	18

Source: ET National Follow Up Survey.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many women-only training schemes there are in the United Kingdom which are Government-funded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Information on the number of these programmes is not held centrally. Training and enterprise councils have discretion under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to operate single-sex training programmes.

Continental Shelf (Deaths and Injuries)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries in the United Kingdom continental shelf in each year from June 1979 to 1 April.

Mr. Forth: The number of accidents causing deaths or serious injuries on or near to offshore installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf have in the past been published annually in the report "Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom". Copies of the report for 1990 are now available in the Library of the House. The information for the calendar years from 1979 to 1990 is as follows:

	Fatalities	*Serious accidents*
1979	10	43
1980	4	45
1981	6	59
1982	14	39

	Fatalities	Serious accidents
1983	10	47
1984	13	59
1985	8	103
1986	3	101
1987	6	59
1988	[1]173	[2]85
1989	3	85
1990	[3]13	87

[1] 167 relate to Piper Alpha.
[2] Includes 11 of the 61 Piper Alpha survivors.
[3] Includes six relating to Brent Spar helicopter accident.

Employment Training

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those parts of the country in which employment training is to be available to people aged 18 to 24 years only; and whether he expects this restriction to be permanent.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The Government are committed to ensuring that employment training plays its proper part in meeting the Government's guarantee and aim for long-term unemployed people. The provision of employment training is now largely a matter for training and enterprise councils. Training and enterprise councils are obliged to ensure that priority is given to those unemployed people who fall within the guarantee and aim groups, including people aged 18 to 24 years. I am satisfied that adequate resources are available for employment training for it to continue to play its part in meeting the Government's guarantee and aim.

British Tourist Authority

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of the British Tourist Authority.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* These matters are the responsibility of the board of the British Tourist Authority and I am asking the chairman to write directly to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give separate figures for the spending by the British Tourist Authority on *(a)* TV advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in the following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Forth: These matters are the responsibility of the board of the British Tourist Authority and I am asking the chairman to write directly to the hon. Gentleman.

HEALTH

Salmonella

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each regional health authority area for each of the past five years the number of cases of food poisoning from salmonella per thousand of the population.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table. This information is not routinely published because the rates are not comparable either between regions or over years. There are a number of reasons for this. Specimens from residents of one region may well be examined in a laboratory in a neighbouring region. The catchment areas of laboratories are unknown and may indeed overlap. Levels of reporting between regions may vary. It is not known how much effect these factors will have on rates, or how the factors have changed over the years.

Laboratory reports to CDSC of salmonellas in faeces (cases and excretors) in England, per thousand population in each Regional Health Authority

RHA	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Northern	0·17	0·24	0·32	0·43	0·67
Yorkshire	0·32	0·43	0·47	0·83	0·64
Trent	0·23	0·28	0·33	0·51	0·57
East Anglian	0·21	0·32	0·31	0·38	0·41
North West Thames	0·25	0·28	0·30	0·36	0·35
North East Thames	0·23	0·26	0·31	0·39	0·40
South East Thames	0·19	0·26	0·31	0·39	0·38
South West Thames	0·32	0·40	0·41	0·52	0·49
Wessex	0·23	0·27	0·35	0·39	0·52
Oxford	0·24	0·28	0·32	0·49	0·51
South Western	0·26	0·30	0·36	0·50	0·51
West Midlands	0·26	0·29	0·38	0·50	0·51
Mersey	0·16	0·24	0·20	0·41	0·41
North Western	0·27	0·34	0·51	0·58	0·56

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of expenditure on *(a)* the national health service, *(b)* the health and community health services current budget and *(c)* the family health service current budget, adjusted for changes in input unit costs, in each year since 1970-71.

Mr. Dorrell: The table gives HCHS current, FHS current and total NHS expenditure adjusted for changes in input unit costs in each year since 1974-75. This information measures changes in total inputs at constant factor cost, but ignores the continuing success of national health service management in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources.

£ million adjusted to 1990-91 base

Year	HCHS current		FHS current		NHS total
	A	B	A	B	
1974-75	—	12,594	—	3,591	18,045
1975-76	—	12,807	—	3,712	18,447
1976-77	—	12,846	—	3,890	18,617
1977-78	—	13,235	—	4,054	18,889
1978-79	—	13,873	—	4,206	19,606
1979-80	—	13,736	—	4,178	19,418
1980-81	—	14,116	—	4,285	19,966
1981-82	—	14,403	—	4,464	20,635
1982-83	—	14,567	—	4,776	21,107

Year	HCHS current		FHS current		NHS total
	A	B	A	B	
1983-84	—	14,587	—	4,882	21,361
1984-85	—	14,570	—	5,005	21,650
1985-86	14,945	14,598	4,817	5,023	21,778
1986-87	15,032	—	4,924	—	22,048
1987-88	15,307	—	5,094	—	22,468
1988-89	15,364	—	5,252	—	22,678
1989-90	15,379	—	5,234	—	22,851
1990-91	16,110	—	5,300	—	23,718

Because of transfers between programmes, consistent information for earlier years is not available. HCHS and FHS figures in column A are in line with those printed in the departmental report (CM15 13) as they have been adjusted to reflect the transfer to the HCHS of family health service administration, Disablement Services Authority and the family health services cash-limited spending. The figures in column B do not reflect these transfers and are therefore not comparable with those for later years. It is not possible to produce HCHS and FHS current expenditure estimates for years prior to 1985-86 on a basis consistent with the revised definition.

Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give figures for the quantities of blood supplied by private companies and the national blood transfusion service respectively to the national health service in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: No blood is supplied by private companies to the NHS. In 1989 the national blood transfusion service issued 1,758,951 units of whole blood to the NHS in England.

Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the pharmaceutical industry about the consequences for pharmaceutical research in the United Kingdom of proposals on the duration of patent protection; and if he will make a statement setting out the nature and origin of the problem.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Representations have been received from individual companies and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry on the relationship between pharmaceutical research and patent life. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs gave to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) on 15 April at columns *32-33*.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline the duties of the Medical Control Authority which supervises pharmaceutical and medical items; and if he will indicate whether there is any appeal system against items being classified as medical or drug treatments.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Medicines Control Agency of the Department of Health acts on behalf of Ministers for the protection of public health through the licensing and control of medicines under the Medicines Act 1968 and EC regulations and directives. Items for which medicinal claims are made are licensable as medicines, though "instruments, apparatus and appliances" are expressly excluded from the Act's scope. In cases of doubt, the Medicines Control Agency expresses an opinion on a product's status, which a company may or may not accept. Ultimately, only the courts can provide an authoritative interpretation of the law if mutual agreement on status cannot be reached.

Wheelchairs and Artificial Limbs

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Disablement Services Authority distributed to the health authorities to run the wheelchair and artificial limb service; and how much each health authority received.

Mr. Dorrell: For 1991-92, the Department made initial allocations of £110·5 million revenue to regional health authorities for purchasing former Disablement Services Authority activities; £4·4 million has also been allocated for committed capital schemes. The amounts distributed to each of the 14 regions were as follows:

£ thousands

Region	Revenue	Capital
Northern	7,335	62
Yorkshire	8,439	34
Trent	10,571	1,130
East Anglian	4,485	30
North West Thames	8,194	130
North East Thames	9,350	300
South East Thames	9,168	145
South West Thames	7,033	30
Wessex	6,591	30
Oxford	5,002	309
South Western	7,550	990
West Midlands	11,644	47
Mersey	5,620	985
South Western	9,519	205
All Regions	110,501	4,427

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for a number of appointments which will fall to be made in 1991 and 1992. Details of each of these could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, information is available in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Infant Formulae

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given to maternity units regarding offers from manufacturers of free samples or supplies of milk powder or other infant formula.

Mr. Dorrell: In July 1989, guidance (HC(89)21), a copy of which is available in the Library, was issued to all regional, district and special health authorities in England

and Wales instructing them neither to accept nor distribute free samples and to refuse to accept subsidised supplies of infant formulas. This was part of the Government's response to the World Health Organisation's programme to promote and protect breast-feeding. In addition, authorities were advised to ensure that acceptance of any gift or other commercial donation should not be seen to have influenced their purchasing choice.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give an estimate of the cost of treating smoking-related illness in England and Wales in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on 4 July 1990 at column *594* and the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 11 March 1991 at column *349*.

Thalassaemia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent he has funded ante-natal research since 1979; if he will give any convenient figures for research into thalassaemia; and what assessment he has made of the saving that consequent improved diagnostic work has made in hospital time and expense.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) on 12 March 1991 at columns *495-96* on the funding of ante-natal research.

The main agency through which the Department supports biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science. I understand that a number of research projects into thalassaemia are currently being undertaken by the MRC.

There has been no assessment of the saving that consequent improved diagnostic work has made in hospital time and expense.

St. Paul's Eye Hospital, Liverpool

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the meeting held with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside and members of a delegation about the proposed closure of St. Paul's eye hospital and the provision of eye care on Merseyside;

(2) if he will list the representations he has received concerning the proposed closure of St. Paul's eye hospital and eye care on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We are considering carefully the points raised at the meeting I had recently with the hon. Member. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be meeting a delegation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) before we come to a final decision.

We have received representations from the Liverpool Central and Southern community health council, Canon Frayling, the Rector of Liverpool, and, in addition to the hon. Members already mentioned, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and the hon. Members who put their names to early-day motions 273 on 19 December 1990 and 773 on 30 April. Our attention has been drawn to a petition presented to the Prime Minister's office and we have received 10 letters addressed directly to Ministers.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report* the hospitals on Merseyside which have applied for trust status; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A total of 130 hospitals and other units have expressed interest in trust status from April 1992. The full list has been placed in the Library. The following 10 units are located within the Mersey Regional Health Authority's boundaries:

Aintree Hospitals (Walton and Fazakerly)
[1]Liverpool Community and Priority Services
Liverpool Obstetrics and Gynaecology Unit
Macclesfield Acute Services
Macclesfield Community and Mental Health Services
[1]Mersey Regional Ambulance Services
Mersey Regional Centre for Radiotherapy and Oncology
[1]Mersey Regional Centre for Neurosciences
[1]St. Helens and Knowsley Community Unit
[1]Southport Acute Unit.

[1] Formal applications already received.

Note: Since the announcement in December the units in Macclesfield have decided to work to a slower timetable.

Hospital Paediatric Pathologists

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of specialist hospital paediatric pathologists in national health service hospitals in each year since 1985; and if he will express this as an average figure for each such hospital offering paediatric services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: One of the national service objectives for 1990-91 was for all regions to have at least one paediatric pathologist post and to have conducted a review of the need for further posts to be established by 1992. All regions have met this objective, although one region has had difficulties in filling its vacant post.

Air Pollution

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much his Department has spent on research into the effects of particulate levels in air on health for each of the last five years;

(2) how much his Department has spent on research into the effects of sulphur dioxide levels in air on health for each of the last five years;

(3) how much his Department has spent on research into the effects of ozone levels in air on health for each of the last five years;

(4) how much has been spent by his Department on research into the effects of lead levels in air on health for each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science. I understand that research into air pollutants is included in the MRC's current research programme.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 14 November 1990 at columns *162-63*. The Department of Health has set up an advisory group on the medical aspects of air pollution episodes. This group was established to consider what advice, if any, should be given by central Government about personal protection measures when levels of air pollution are high. An executive summary of its first report on ozone was published on 7 May and copies are available in the Library. Copies of the full report, published by HMSO, will be available later in the summer.

The group is now considering the winter pollutants with particular regard to sulphur dioxide and plans to publish the report of its findings early next year. The advisory group will be considering particulates along with sulphur dioxide and the winter pollutants.

The levels of lead in air in the United Kingdom, except for one or two specific industrial sites, are well within levels set by the EC and have reduced considerably over recent years due to Government action to reduce lead in petrol.

NHS Employees (Letter)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the cost of sending all national health service employees the standard letter concerning national health service reforms dated March 1991 signed by Duncan Nichol.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The cost of printing and distributing Duncan Nichol's letter to health authorities was £127,000, a unit cost of 13p per letter. The cost of the exercise was met by the Department of Health. The Department maintains a budget for NHS communications, part of which is intended to keep NHS employees informed of developments in the health service and to enable them to participate more fully.

A copy of the letter is available in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will be retaining outside consultants to evaluate second-wave applicants for trust status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. Following a competitive tendering exercise the Department has appointed management consultants Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte to assist with the financial evaluation of second-wave applicants for trust status.

Abortion

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is yet in a position to publish the Government's response to the 10th report of the Social Services Committee, Session 1989-90, on its inquiry into the working of the conscience clause in the Abortion Act 1967.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have today published, as Command Paper 1538, their response to the 10th report from the Social Services Committee, Session 1989-90. Copies are available from the Vote Office and have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a statement on the status of local authority care home trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 March at column *256*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

John F. Kennedy Park

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funds will be allocated for the removal of graffiti at John F. Kennedy park, Bessbrook, County Armagh; and if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the removal of graffiti in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: There are no proposals to remove graffiti. District councils are empowered under article 18 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 to remove graffiti from private property. Government Departments and statutory bodies are responsible for the removal of graffiti from their own properties.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992, indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Brooke: The readily available information about the appointments for which I am responsible, a number of which will fall to be made in 1991 and 1992, is given in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library.

Housing Executive (Rates Collection)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total value of rates collected by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive from housing executive tenants annually in each of the last three years; and what is the actual or estimated total cost per annum of this rate collection.

Mr. Needham: I have been informed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that it is not possible to disaggregate the total value of rates collected as rent and rates are collated and collected as one amount. This also applies to the cost of rate collection.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Munny Ltd.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the date of the last accounts filed at Companies house for Munny Ltd.

Mr. Redwood: The last accounts filed at Companies house for Munny Ltd. were for the period ending 31 March 1988, and these were received on 6 May 1989. The registrar is currently pursuing the company in respect of the 1989 and 1990 accounts and annual returns. The directors have been warned that continued failure to file may lead to prosecution.

Chancery Group

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all the companies in the Chancery Group, the regulatory body each company is a member of, and the date of the last accounts of each company filed at Companies house.

Mr. Redwood: The registrar has confirmed that a company called Chancery Group plc was incorporated on 6 June 1990. The first accounts, for the period ending 31 March 1991, in which subsidiary companies would be listed are due be filed by 31 October 1991.

Chancery plc is an authorised institution under the Banking Act 1987 and a member of the Securities and Futures Authority.

Insolvency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to expand the work of the Department of Trade and Industry on insolvency.

Mr. Redwood: I have no such plans. The insolvency service recruits staff when necessary to meet its workload.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for increasing competition among insolvency practitioners.

Mr. Redwood: Following the recommendation of the insolvency review committee chaired by Sir Kenneth Cork, Government policy is to ensure that there are sufficient suitably experienced insolvency practitioners available to compete for insolvency appointments whilst at the same time enforcing acceptable standards of education and experience. This has been achieved by the introduction of licensing.

Seven professional bodies, representing accountants, solicitors and specialists in insolvency, which are able to satisfy the Secretary of State that they regulate the practice of their members, have been authorised to license their members if they are fit and proper persons to act as insolvency practitioners. Any professional body that considers that it is able to satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements may apply for recognition.

In addition, any person able to satisfy similar requirements but who is not a member of a recognised professional body may apply to the Secretary of State for authorisation. As at 31 December 1990, the professional bodies had licensed a total of 1,751 practitioners and the Secretary of State a further 138.

In liquidations and bankruptcies, the creditors have the opportunity to vote on the selection and remuneration of the practitioner. An administrative receiver is appointed by a secured creditor, who fixed his remuneration, but he is required to hold a meeting of creditors and they may apply to the court if they object to his conduct or remuneration.

Amoco

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he received the recommendation on the Elf-Aquitaine takeover of Amoco's oil refining and allied downstream business interests in the United Kingdom from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; when he anticipates making a decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission submitted its report on the acquisition by Societé Nationale Elf Aquitaine of certain assets of the Amoco Corporation to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 27 March 1991. My right hon. Friend laid the report before the House and published it on Friday 3

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Export Credits Guarantee Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Sainsbury: Figures of expenditure by ECGD on press and public relations, broken down where possible between press advertising and other promotional expenditure, are as follows:

	Total	*Press Advertising*[1]	*Other*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
1985-86	541	—	—
1986-87	703	—	—
1987-88	747	—	—
1988-89	1,112	710	402
1989-90	1,271	986	285
[2]1990-91	1,067	692	375

[1] Separate figures are not available before 1988-89. No expenditure has been incurred on TV and radio advertising.
[2] provisional

For the years 1979-80 to 1984-85, the expenditure was recorded by the Central Office of Information as an allied service. The budget for 1991-92 has still to be finalised, and will depend on developments in the privatisation process.

Bankruptcies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will bring forward proposals to prevent banks from liquidating viable firms in such a way as to pre-empt other creditors by early appointment of receivers.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The Governor of the Bank of England has warned banks against precipitate action in winding up companies. It is more a matter for the bank than for the DTI.

WALES

Food Poisoning

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each health authority in Wales for each of the past five years, the number of cases of food poisoning from salmonella per thousand of the population.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of cases of food poisoning from salmonella for each district health authority in Wales is not available. However, data on the number of reports of salmonellas in Wales as a whole are given in the table.

Laboratory reports of salmonellas[1] from Wales to the communicable disease surveillance centre

Year	Total reports	Rates per 1,000 population
1985	450	0·16
1986	690	0·24
1987	746	0·26
1988	819	0·29
1989	[2]1,161	[2]0·40
1990	[2]1,306	[2]0·45

[1] Laboratory reports of Salmonellas (excluding Typhi and Paratyphi) in Faeces-cases and Excreters in Wales.
[2] Provisional data and rates. (The 1990 rate is based on 1989 Mid Year Population estimate as the 1990 estimate is not yet available.)

Council Tax

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of domestic residences in each of the property value bands of the proposed council tax in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of dwellings falling into band

Property band	Number
A	181,600
B	214,700
C	241,700
D	199,900
E	171,900
F	85,800
G	63,400
Total	1,159,000

Baglan Moors Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the proposed starting date for the new district general hospital at Baglan Moors remains as set out in his letter of 13 September 1990 to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The projected start date of 1992-93 is currently under review by West Glamorgan health authority which is responsible for progressing the scheme.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Welsh Development Agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 1 May 1991.

History

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he proposes to amend the statutory order for history in the national curriculum in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Yesterday I published for consultation proposals to amend the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in History) (Wales) Order 1991.

These, which relate to the programme of study for key stage 3, have been prepared following a review of the structure of unit 27 and its links with unit 18 which I recently asked Professor Rees Davies and the ex-chairman of the History Committee for Wales and other ex-members of the committee to undertake.

My proposals will provide for an even more valuable and attractive introduction to 20th century history for pupils in key stage 3. They will also bring unit 27 closer in its objectives and scope to the other compulsory units in key stage 3.

I am consulting the Curriculum Council for Wales and a wide range of educational interests on the proposals and I have asked for their responses by 10 June. I shall place a copy of my proposals in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Baby Food Products

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to bring forward legislation requiring baby food products to bear labels stating their *(a)* meat content, *(b)* calorie content and *(c)* protein content; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The European Commission has issued a draft directive which lays down compositional and labelling requirements for cereal-based and other processed foods for infants and young children. The proposals set out minimum content levels for meat and certain other characteristic ingredients and require a statement of the available energy and protein content to appear on the label. Negotiations in Brussels are scheduled to commence early in June. The Commission also intends to introduce proposals shortly on quantitative ingredients declaration of foodstuffs.

Sweeteners

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek information from Commissioner Bergemann about the nature of the representations he received from the Government of France on 14 April relating to his decision on 15 April to exclude snack foods from the directive on sweeteners.

Mr. Maclean: The next stage of the procedure will involve a detailed examination of all the considerations relevant to the revised proposals that the Commission will be bringing to Council following the first reading in the European Parliament.

Animal Medicine Licence Fees

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to see representatives of the National Office of Animal Health about animal medicine licence fees.

Mr. Maclean: A meeting has been arranged for 21 May.

Nephrops

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to establish a pressure stock licensing stock scheme for nephrops, or to ban twin-rig trawling for nephrops; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: These and other ideas for the future management of nephrops were discussed at a Sea Fish Industry Authority seminar on nephrops on 10 April. All parties involved are now reflecting on the views expressed.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current state of the North sea and Irish sea nephrops stock.

Mr. Curry: The advisory committee on fishery management of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas has undertaken a thorough review of the various EC nephrops fisheries including those in the North and Irish seas and, in its latest report, recommended that each should be subject to its own specific total allowable catch, bearing in mind the fishing effort involved. We have asked the EC Commission to act on this advice and are now awaiting appropriate proposals.

Sea Level (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has carried out of the risk to London from rising sea levels.

Mr. Curry: Sea level rise was one of the factors taken into account in the design of the Thames barrier and associated tidal defences which protect London from flooding. Current best estimates of global sea level rise by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change fall within the range of possibilities considered in the barrier design. This Department sponsors research to monitor sea level trends and is also closely monitoring scientific evidence emerging from other sources.

Surplus Food Scheme

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the invitation to organisations to participate in the 1991 surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I announced to the House on 13 February that the surplus food scheme would be continued for a further year. Following that announcement, the press coverage that attended it and the individual invitations issued by my Department, we have been able to designate 774 organisations as potential participants in this year's scheme. There are approximately 3,800 tonnes of butter and 3,000 tonnes of beef available to be distributed to the most needy citizens.

Once again I have designated more organisations than in previous years in order to ensure, as far as possible, the availability of food across the country. But as the quantities are limited, it must be understood that the assistance will, necessarily, be spread even more thinly as a result. The produce will be shared as fairly as possible on the basis of an amount proportional to the number of needy people it will reach. I am giving special priority in allocating this food to organisations providing prepared meals and to those serving the homeless and destitute. In addition, in order to receive an allocation, the smallest organisations may have to co-operate this year to keep the processing and distribution costs to a minimum.

I am placing a list of all the organisations I have designated in the Library of the House and officials will now be writing to all the organisations that applied.

Nutrition

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the policy concerning recommended amounts of nutrients, as set out in the report by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy in 1979, paragraphs 13 to 16, remains Her Majesty's Government's policy; and if he will make it his policy to maintain it by ensuring that such recommended amounts are the minimum necessary to ensure that the majority of the population has adequate nutrition;

(2) what consideration has been given by his Department to the use of dietary reference values as a means of providing information to the public about the daily intake of nutrients.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1987, the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy to which the Government look for expert advice on diet and nutrition has been engaged in a review of the recommended daily amounts—RDAs—for food energy and nutrients set in 1979. Until its conclusions are published the 1979 RDAs remain current. Its report is currently being finalised, and we hope that it will be ready for publication in May or June. Once the report is published I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list for each of his Department's offices covering the Doncaster area, the average length of time taken to process applications for each of the benefits administered by his Department; and what are the national averages;

(2) what are the latest figures for the Doncaster area for the number of people claiming *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* family credit; and what were the figures for the last 12 months.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Social Fund

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund loan applications were refused by each of his Department's offices covering the Doncaster area in *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* the current year to date, due to perceived inability to repay.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the

Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many applications for social fund loans from the York local office were refused on the grounds of inability to pay; and if he will show this figure as a percentage of all applications for loans from the York local office in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 to date;

(2) if he will indicate the factors used by the York local office to determine high, medium and low priority groups and priority circumstances for community care grant applications *(a)* before 6 September 1990, *(b)* between 6 September and 21 October 1990 and *(c)* since 22 October 1990, and the reasons why the criteria were changed at these dates.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information office.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit review boards have sat in each year since 1984; and what was the number of successful appellant reviews during each of these years.

Miss Widdecombe: Data on review boards are not available for years prior to 1988-89. Based on information, which has not been validated, from 362 out of a total of 483 local authorities, the number of housing benefit cases submitted to a review board in 1988-89 was 2,213, of which 481 resulted in revised determinations. For 1989-90, on the basis of 320 returns, the figures were 2,336 and 530 respectively, but determinations in favour of the appellant are not separately recorded.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will place in the Library an amendment or an addendum to the housing benefits guidance manual to incorporate the provisions for a period in which persons who it is alleged have received an overpayment of housing benefit may make offers for repayment or appeals in respect of overpayment decisions prior to recovery action, as incorporated in the overpayment recovery guide for his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: Departmental officials are currently working on a number of amendments to the housing benefits guidance manual. Among them will be enhanced guidance on overpayments which will reflect the overpayments recovery guide as regards the action to be taken prior to the commencement of a recovery. The amended guidance will be placed in the Library.

Benefit Eligibility

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds were ineligible for benefits despite being unemployed in (1) 1989 and (2) 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Any unemployed 16 or 17-year-old who is seeking a youth training placement is eligible for income support if severe hardship would otherwise result. Seventy-one per cent. of applications for severe hardship payments were successful in 1990 against 29 per cent unsuccessful. In 1989, the figures were 66 per cent. successful and 34 per cent. unsuccessful. Sixteen or 17-year-olds are not eligible for unemployment benefit because they are unable to satisfy the national insurance contribution conditions.

Footnote: 19,280 applications for severe hardship payments were successful in 1990 against 7,767 unsuccessful. In 1989 there were 11,965 successful and 6,164 unsuccessful applications.

Care Homes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were claiming income support or supplementary benefit in respect of (i) residential care and (ii) nursing homes for each year since 1979 at each of the Newcastle upon Tyne benefit offices.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rent and Community Charge Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the marginal tax benefit withdrawal rate on additional gross income for a person paying standard rate income tax and national insurance and receiving both a rent rebate and community charge benefit as from April 1991; and what is the tax benefit withdrawal rate for each element.

Mr. Jack: The 1988 social security reforms and subsequent tax and national insurance changes eliminated the highest marginal deduction rates and it is now virtually impossible to find oneself worse off as a result of an increase in gross pay.

Someone in work will normally have standard deduction rates of 25 per cent. for income tax and 9 per cent. for national insurance. The marginal deduction rate for such a person paying standard rate income tax, national insurance and receiving both a rent rebate and community charge benefit as from April 1991 is 87 per cent.

The marginal deduction rate on total gross pay for each element is:

	Per cent.
Tax	25
National insurance	9
Housing benefit	43
Community charge benefit	10

Community Care

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table indicating *(a)* the number of applications for community care grants received, *(b)* the number of community care grants paid, and *(c)* the cash value of community care grants paid by the York local office in each month in 1990 for each of elderly, mentally ill/handicapped, disabled/chronically sick, young persons leaving local authority care, persons who have misused drugs/alcohol, ex-offenders, persons without a settled way of life and families under exceptional pressure.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the client groups requested, but details of the total number of community care grants received and paid and the cash value of those paid are in the Library.

DEFENCE

NAAFI

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement in respect of the future of the NAAFI.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NAAFI fulfils an important support and welfare role for the services. The effects on NAAFI of changes in the structure of our armed forces are being studied.

Armed Forces

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the size of the armed forces, broken down by army, navy and air force and by civilian and military personnel in each of the member states of the European Community, United States of America, Sweden, Norway and the USSR.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of the size of the United Kingdom armed forces are shown in volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1990"—Cm 1022-11. Information on the size of foreign armed forces is contained in "The Military Balance" published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, copies of which are held by the Library of the House.

RAF Leeming (Noise)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of how many houses in the vicinity of Royal Air Force Leeming has statutory injurious affection compensation, or non-statutory equivalent compensation, has been paid on account of serious noise disturbance created by the deployment of Tornado aircraft to that air station.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence complies administratively with the provision of part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973. The Act confers a right to injurious affection compensation—IAC—for depreciation in the value of dwellings and certain small business properties caused by the physical effects, for example, noise, of the bringing into use of new public works. Considerable works were undertaken at RAF Leeming to enable the deployment of Tornado aircraft to take place. To date, 374 IAC claims have been received and 40 of these have been settled.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many houses in the vicinity of Royal Air Force Leeming have been acquired with the agreement of their owners on account of serious noise disturbance created by the deployment of Tornado aircraft to that air station; and under what statutory or administrative provisions were such acquisitions carried out and payments made to the home owners concerned.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence's policy, which is non-statutory, is limited to the areas around military airfields where we offer to purchase homes subject to average noise levels of 83DB(A) and above. This allows an opportunity for those most affected by noise to move away. At RAF Leeming 19 offers were made which resulted in the purchase of 12 homes.

Armed Forces (Pay)

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the levels of pay for all ranks of the armed services stationed in the United Kingdom and overseas.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government agreed to implement in full, from 1 April, the recommendations made by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. The current rates of military salary for all ranks up to and including brigadier and equivalent are shown in tables 1, 2 and 3 of the 20th report of the review body—Cm 1414, January 1991. Pay levels for senior officers are recommended by the Top Salaries Review Body. Following the Government's decision to stage the implementation of the TSRB award, salary levels for 1991-92 will be as follows:

	From 1 April 1991 £	*From 1 December 1991* £
Major General	52,100	53,000
Lieutenant General	59,450	60,000
General	82,800	84,250
Field Marshal	102,950	104,750

Army ranks are shown; the pay rates apply equally to equivalent ranks in the other services.

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the levels of pay for civilian armed services personnel stationed in the United Kingdom and overseas.

Mr. Alan Clark: The expression "civilian armed services personnel" is a contradiction in terms.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Chris Patten: None.

ENERGY

Renewable Energy Programmes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state the sources of separate expenditure on renewable energy programmes in or for Scotland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department supports an extensive programme of research, development and demonstration

of sources of renewable energy where those sources show the potential for economic viability and are environmentally acceptable. For expenditure on that programme, by individual technology since 1979, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) gave him on 26 April at columns *613-16*. In 1990-91 total expenditure was over £20 million. Expenditure is distributed throughout the United Kingdom. There is no specific allocation for Scotland.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the information he has on the number of combined heat and power schemes currently operational in *(a)* London and *(b)* each of the other European Community capital cities.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not aware of a source for such detailed information. However, as my answer to the hon. Member on 22 February at columns *278-79* points out, the Office of Electricity Regulation is in the process of gathering information on combined heat and power—CHP—utilisation in the United Kingdom. My Department does not hold detailed information on the extent of combined heat and power utilisation in European Community capital cities.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the expenses included in the £12,439,000 gross expenditure on privatisation of the electricity supply industry in 1989-90, apart from the £12·1 million paid to outside organisations.

Mr. Wakeham: The additional expenses are mainly those associated with the establishment of the successor companies to the Central Electricity Generating Board.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give for each relevant year his Department's total gross expenditure on the privatisation of *(a)* British Gas and *(b)* the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Wakeham: The total gross external costs incurred by the Department of Energy in connection with the privatisation of British Gas and the electricity supply industry in England and Wales were as follows:

£ million

	British Gas	*Electricity Supply Industry*
1985-86	1·4	—
1986-87	196·6	—
1987-88	53·3	0·8
1988-89	22·5	5·5
1989-90	4·0	12·4
1990-91[1]	3·5	303·1

[1] The figure for 1990-91 is the gross provision Voted by Parliament. The final outturn figure will be published in the Appropriation Account for 1990-91 later this year.

Source: Department of Energy Annual Appropriation Accounts 1985-86 to 1989-90 and Supply Estimates 1991-92, Class V Energy.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the £4,024,000 residual expenses in 1989-90 from the sale of shares in British Gas.

Mr. Wakeham: The residual expenses in 1989-90 consisted of: £1,707,000 in connection with the gas bill voucher scheme; £2,303,500 in connection with the bonus share issue; and £13,500 in connection with the administration of the British Gas share offer companies.

Natural Gas

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current level of imports of natural gas into the United Kingdom, what proposals there are to increase this level; and what criteria he will adopt in considering these proposals.

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990, imports of natural gas from Norway accounted for 13·5 per cent. of total supplies. A small amount—less than 0·1 per cent. of total supplies—of liquefied natural gas was imported from Algeria. I am aware of a number of proposals that might increase this level. In considering any import proposals, the Government will weigh carefully the availability of competitive supplies from the United Kingdom continental shelf and the market opportunities open.

ENVIRONMENT

Contracting Out

14. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent it is the policy of his Department to contract work out to the private sector.

Mr. Heseltine: It has been the Government's policy since 1980 to transfer work from Government Departments to the private sector whenever this is commensurate with sound management and represents good value for money. My Department supports that policy.

Council Housing

15. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses there are; how many council *(a)* houses and *(b)* flats have been sold since May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: English local authorities owned some 2·4 million houses and 1·6 million flats in April 1990. About 1·1 million houses and 120,000 flats have been sold into owner-occupation between April 1979 and December 1990. Sales of flats picked up markedly in 1987 when higher discounts came into operation, and flats now represent a fifth of all sales.

35. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for public sector home-building; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: In the first quarter of 1991, 2,000 new dwellings were completed by the public sector, mainly local authorities, in England. Housing associations are becoming the major providers of new subsidised rented housing and their output is forecast to increase by nearly half over the next three years. Full details of housebuilding by sector are published monthly by the Department in an information bulletin.

36. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any new proposals which would enable local authorities to use accrued capital receipts to build more homes for rent.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities are required to set aside part of their capital receipts that have accrued from the sale of assets to meet outstanding loan debt and other liabilities. The remainder they may spend in new capital investment. We have no plans to reconsider these underlying principles, although the application in practice is something we keep under review.

Vacant Land

16. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in bringing the vacant public land register up to date.

Mr. Yeo: The measures announced yesterday in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) are designed to improve the information available from owners' registers.

Community Charge

17. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which councils have the lowest rate of collection of the community charge.

Mr. Portillo: Collection of charges for 1990-91 continues, but the average collection rate of the 250 authorities for which we have information was already over 90 per cent. at the end of March. Only Islington and Lambeth had collected less than 70 per cent. and even they had achieved two thirds of their budgeted figure.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the estimated cost to the Exchequer of the community charge reduction scheme for 1991-92 announced in November; what was the estimated cost to the Exchequer of the further revised scheme in 1991-92; and what is the estimated cost to the Exchequer of the revised scheme in 1991-92 in the light of the Community Charge (General Reduction) Act 1991.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* When the community charge reduction scheme was announced in January 1991, the estimated cost of the scheme in 1991-92 was £1·7 billion. Following the £140 general reduction and the changes to the reduction scheme which followed the Budget, it is estimated that the cost of the scheme in 1991-92 will be just over £1·2 billion.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of the fund to cover local authorities' additional administrative expenses arising as a consequence of the Community Charge (General Reduction) Act; and what are the criteria by which it will be allocated to authorities.

Mr. Key: We have undertaken to meet all reasonable additional costs incurred as a result of the Community Charge (General Reduction) Act 1991 and the associated changes in the community charge reduction scheme.

26. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take action to abolish the 20 per cent. payment of poll tax in the current year for people on low incomes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We have not proposed any change for the remaining period of the community charge.

Council Tax

18. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if there is to be a special rebate for disabled people who have incurred alterations to their home which falls into band A; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Necessary alterations to the home of a disabled person will be disregarded in assessing the council tax band into which a property will fall. A disabled person's home which, without the alterations, would fall in band A will thus attract council tax at the lowest rate. Rebates of up to 100 per cent. will be available to help disabled people with low incomes.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has of the number and proportion of properties in London which fall within each band of his proposed council tax.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The tables published on 23 April showing illustrative council tax bills included the estimated proportion of properties falling in each band in each local authority area.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out *(a)* the level of rate support grant assumed to be paid to Dacorum borough council for 1991-92 under the community charge and *(b)* the level of grant assumed in the indicative tables of council tax paid by his Department.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* With the community charge, the revenue support grant paid to Dacorum supports spending by both the borough and county council. Under our proposal for the council tax, grant will be paid directly to county councils. Any comparison of the level of grant paid to Dacorum would be misleading.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how local values are weighted by the national average of values to assess the council tax payroll in Grimsby and Humberside; what weighting factor he used; and what equation was used for incomes.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Local values are not weighted by national average values, nor is an equation for income used, in estimating illustrative council tax bills.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing nationally and for each region the number of dwellings by tenure in each council tax band;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the council tax at the standard rate as a percentage of the quintile groups by equivalised disposable income for single adult retired, single adult non-retired, single adult with children and two or more adult retired households;

(3) what is his estimate of the gross amount of council tax payable on local authority dwellings in metropolitan districts, London boroughs and non-metropolitan districts and the amount accounted for by rent rebates;

(4) if he will publish a table showing nationally and regionally his estimate of the number of privately rented dwellings in each council tax band, the number in each case benefiting from rate relief, the amount of tax due and the amount relieved;

(5) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each council tax band shown in his illustrative tables the number and assumed average value nationally and regionally of leasehold dwellings together with his estimate of the current average leasehold value;

(6) if he will publish a table showing for each council tax band shown in his illustrative tables the number and assumed average value nationally and regionally of *(a)* council and *(b)* other dwellings together with the assumed gross and net yields from the council tax in each case.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of domestic residences in each of the property value bands of the proposed council tax in England.

Mr. Key: The notes covering the tables of illustrative council tax bills published on 23 April show the number of homes in England, 18·9 million, and in table 1 the percentage of properties falling in each of the seven proposed bands.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proportion of households in England and in each standard region are in leasehold dwellings; and how leasehold dwellings will be valued for the council tax;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby the number of leasehold dwellings, council dwellings and other rented dwellings in each council tax band and the basis on which they are to be valued.

Mr. Key: The information requested for Great Grimsby is not available. The Government are presently consulting on the method of allocating properties to different council tax bands.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby his estimate of the number and percentage of householders who actually paid rates in 1979 and 1988 together with the number expected to pay the council tax.

Mr. Key: The number of domestic hereditaments liable for rates in Great Grimsby on 1 April 1979 and 1 April 1988 was 33,100 and 35,300 respectively. No information is available about the numbers or percentages of householders in Great Grimsby who actually paid rates, or about numbers expected to pay the council tax after taking account of rebates.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing his estimate of the percentage uplift on current market housing values implied in the council tax and similar tables for Great Grimsby, Mole Valley, Barrow in Furness, Westminster and Wandsworth; and if he will provide corresponding figures for each band.

Mr. Key: No uplift on current market housing values is implied in the council tax.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for *(a)* Great Grimsby, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Wandsworth and *(d)* Mole Valley, his estimate of the percentage of dwellings in each of the seven bands of the council tax.

Mr. Key: The estimated percentage of homes in each band in each local authority area was shown in the table published on 23 April.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby his estimate of the average and quintile market values in 1989 of local authority dwellings, other dwelling and all dwellings; and if he will provide corresponding figures for valuations under the proposed council tax.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the percentage rate of council tax on the value of properties from £10,000 to £500,000 in £10,000 steps on the basis of a standard rate of 4 per cent. on a property worth £73,000.

Mr. Key: If council tax were at a standard rate of 4 per cent, the percentage rate for all properties would be 4 per cent.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many residents in the city of Gloucester will benefit from reduced payments under his council tax proposals.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish tables listing *(a)* local authorities in order of percentage spending over standard spending assessment and *(b)* local authorities paying the highest illustrative bills; and if he will make a statement on the correlation between placings in the two tables and his assessment of the statistical relationship between the two factors;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby his estimate of the number of properties with a current market value of (i) less than £20,000, £20,000 to £30,000 and £30,000 to £40,000, (ii) £68,000 to £88,000 and (iii) over £160,000 together with his estimate of the numbers which will fall into each council tax band under his proposals;

(3) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing nationally and for each standard region the estimated annual yield per council tax payer per band and the estimated annual yield from applying the same rate of tax in the standard band to all properties at current market values;

(4) what proportion nationally and regionally of the council tax is payable by tax payers in the second lowest and the second highest bands; and what is the corresponding proportion of the market values of the dwellings to the total in each case;

(5) if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby the numbers in each band qualifying for a 25 per cent. discount and the resultant increase in the amount of council tax payable by the other householders;

(6) if he will publish a table showing the estimated total yield and the yield per band tax payer from the proposed council tax in each band at (i) the proposed percentage difference from the £68,000 to £88,000 standard, (ii) a percentage representing the difference between £73,000 and the mid-point of the five restricted bands and the minimum and maximum of, respectively, the bottom and top bands; and if he will add corresponding figures for each standard region;

(7) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for *(a)* Great Grimsby, *(b)* Barrow in Furness, *(c)* Westminster, *(d)* Wandsworth and *(e)* Mole Valley, the amount of local authority expenditure per household and per adult and the corresponding amounts of poll tax and council tax, respectively;

(8) if he will publish a table showing the median, average, upper and lower quartiles, and upper and lower deciles of the value of dwellings nationally and in each region, the average market value of dwellings within each tenth, the council tax in each of such tenths for standard spending for two or more adults, and the amount of council tax which would be payable in each case if the standard tax payable was calculated on the difference between the average value and the national median;

(9) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing nationally and for each region the number of dwellings and average current market value in each of his seven council tax bands, their aggregate value in each case and the percentage of the value of all dwellings, the difference in each case between the average value per dwelling and the value for council tax purposes, and the difference between the average amount of tax payable under the proposed council tax and the amount which would be payable if the percentage in each case were adjusted to take account of the percentage difference between the average value and £73,000.

(10) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each region, each metropolitan and other county, and the City of London the budget relative to standard spending assessment, the average band D council tax for two people, the proportion of homes in each band and their average value, and the corresponding average earnings of adult males in the year to April 1990;

(11) if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the council districts in which the average value home is in bands A and G, the average value of homes and the council budgets relative to standard spending assessment, the standard amount of band D council tax, the proportion of homes in each tax band, and the overall gross and net yield from the tax as a percentage of the value of the homes;

(12) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for, respectively, the aggregate of the counties above and below the county with the median average earnings of full-time adult male workers, the yield per adult for the council tax at (i) the standard rate and (ii) the actual rate together with the respective average earnings per head for full-time adult male workers and the average value of dwellings per household;

(13) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for Barrow in Furness, Great Grimsby, Westminster, Wandsworth and Elmbridge the amount of council tax payable on the median value in each band as a percentage of that value;

(14) if he will publish a table showing the amount of council tax payable on the median value in each band as a percentage of that value and the corresponding figures for each region;

(15) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each region, each metropolitan and other county, and the City of London, the estimated gross yield from the proposed council tax as a percentage of the capital value of the dwellings in each band and overall;

(16) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for Elmbridge and Great Grimsby (i) the council budget relative to the standard spending assessment, (ii) the amount of tax for two or more adults in properties in bands A and D together with the percentage of homes in each band and (iii) the average value of homes in bands A and G; and if he will set out the reasons for the difference.

(17) further to paragraph 6 of his illustrative tables for the new council tax, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the council districts in which the average value home is in bands A or G gross and net expenditure per household, the gross and net central Government contribution per household, the composition of households in family expenditure terms, the allowance per household made for different categories of public expenditure including in particular housing, education and social security, together with any categories of expenditure where there are market differences in expenditure in A and G areas or uncertainty in forecasting.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what impact there would be on the assumed levels of council tax in Dacorum borough for each band in the published indicative tables if the property valuations concerned were all 10 per cent. higher, assuming there to be no charges elsewhere in England.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the average illustrative council tax bill for a house occupied by two or more adults and by a single adult, respectively, in each local authority area in England on the same basis as the illustrative figures which have been published by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Key: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. Members to the answer I gave on 29 April 1991 to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), *Official Report*, Volume 190, column *12*.

21. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the proposed council tax.

28. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has had so far to his consultative paper on local government taxation.

Mr. Portillo: The Government's council tax proposal has been widely welcomed by hon. Members and by those involved in local government. I look forward to receiving detailed responses to the consultation exercise now under way.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) further to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column 13, if he will define a standard level of services and the level of provision that would sustain a local area covered by the definition; if he will explain how this can be held constant over different types of area; and if he will assess the consequences of variations on the relevance of the standard spending assessment calculations on the council tax;

(2) what is the relationship between the levels of council tax set for a district and the standard spending assessments for that district.

Mr. Key: The nature of standard spending assessments is set out in section 2.2 of "The Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England)", approved by the House of Commons on 18 January 1990. Standard spending

assessments are calculated from data which are specific to each local authority and hence reflect differences between areas. Under the proposed council tax, if all authorities were to spend at the level of their standard assessment, the bills for each of the seven bands of property values would be the same in each area.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how and when the standard spending assessment is adjusted to take account of changes in the level of unemployment; and what is his estimate of the additional costs falling on Grimsby borough council in each category of spending covered by the standard spending assessment for each percentage point rise in unemployment in the Grimsby area.

Mr. Key: The level of unemployment is not a factor used in the calculation of standard spending assessments. There is no evidence that spending on the services provided by local authorities should rise in proportion to increases in the rate of unemployment. Local spending decisions are, in any case, a matter for Grimsby borough council in the light of its knowledge of local circumstances.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* for *(a)* Grimsby and *(b)* Cleethorpes, (i) the percentage by which spending is above the standard spending assessment and (ii) the proposed council tax for each band; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Tables showing illustrative council tax bills in each local authority area were published on 23 April. The tables included the assumed percentage spending relative to the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answers of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will ensure that an increase in spending over the standard spending assessment does not fall disproportionately heavily on the council tax levied by poorer boroughs.

Mr. Key: Under our proposals for the council tax, spending above the standard spending assessment in every local authority will be met pound for pound by local domestic tax payers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for *(a)* Great Grimsby, *(b)* Barrow in Furness, *(c)* Westminster, *(d)* Wandsworth and *(e)* Mole Valley, the proportion of council expenditure financed out of revenue from rates in 1979-80 and 1989-90, the estimated proportion financed out of the poll tax in 1990-91 and his forecast under the council tax.

Mr. Key: It is not possible to produce comparable figures on an individual authority basis for the years requested.

Opencast Mining

19. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many opencast development proposals have been refused by his Department since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: Information is available only from 1987-88 for opencast coal cases. Since then a total of 25 opencast coal appeals have been dismissed and 30 allowed. The equivalent figures for other minerals are 108 appeals dismissed and 66 allowed; and for non-minerals cases, 58,140 dismissed and 31,464 allowed.

River Test

20. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on water quality of the River Test.

Mr. Trippier: None. The condition of the River Test is a matter for which the National Rivers Authority is primarily responsible. The Wallop brook, a tributary of the Test, is among a number of rivers for which the NRA has today announced proposals for tackling the problem of low flows.

Housing Action Trusts

24. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 for expenditure on housing action trusts; and what were the sums budgeted for this purpose.

Sir George Young: Details of planned expenditure were given in the public expenditure White Papers. There was no expenditure on housing action trusts in 1989-90 or 1990-91, but tenants in North Hull have now voted by more than two to one for a trust.

Low-cost Housing

25. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on progress in providing low-cost housing in shire districts.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given today to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) about the supply of rented housing and to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) about low-cost housing in rural areas.

Drinking Water

27. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in bringing United Kingdom drinking water up to the standards of the 1980 EC directive.

Mr. Trippier: For the small number of standards which are not met at present, I am advised by the drinking water inspectorate that water companies are on schedule to remedy the position as quickly as possible, taking practicalities into account.

Homelessness

30. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were registered as homeless during 1990-91.

Sir George Young: Statistics for the first quarter of 1991 are not yet available. In 1990 accommodation was found for 145,800 households accepted as homeless by English local authorities.

Atmospheric Pollution

31. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the European Environment Commissioner to discuss atmospheric pollution.

Mr. Trippier: At the Council of Environment Ministers meeting in March, when the Council reached a common position on the draft directive on emissions from large diesel vehicles.

Rented Properties

32. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional dwellings for rent he estimates will be provided during 1991-92 by private landlords.

Sir George Young: It is impossible to give an exact figure. We are, however, confident that the measures that we have introduced to encourage the private rented sector are having the desired effect and there is significant anecdotal evidence of increased activity in the market. In particular, business expansion scheme companies have so far raised over £700 million, sufficient to provide about 12,000 additional homes to rent.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to deal with the shortage of rented accommodation at affordable rents.

Sir George Young: We have substantially increased the public resources available through the Housing Corporation for the development of new subsidised housing by housing associations from £1·1 billion last year to over £2 billion by 1993-94. Together with their increased ability to draw in private investment, this will permit an increase in output by associations from 27,000 last year to around 40,000 by 1993-94. Deregulation of the private rented sector is also making more properties available to rent. Housing benefit is available up to reasonable market rents for people who cannot afford their full housing costs.

South Yorkshire Rapid Light Transit

33. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any additional funding will be made available to the district council of Barnsley to offset expenditure on the South Yorkshire rapid light transit railway.

Mr. Portillo: I recently met a delegation from the four South Yorkshire district authorities and the passenger transport authority to hear their concerns in relation to the financing costs of the supertram. Following a constructive discussion officials are now discussing possible options with the authorities.

Housing Co-operatives

34. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations on the Housing Corporation's new proposals for the registration of housing co-operatives.

Mr. Yeo: It is not clear to which document the hon. Member is referring. If it is the Housing Corporation's draft strategy on housing co-operatives, my right hon. Friend has received two representations. If it is the corporation's new registration criteria for all housing associations, my right hon. Friend has received one representation.

Local Authorities (Spending Controls)

37. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will release all spending controls on local authority expenditure.

Mr. Key: The Government have a duty to protect local taxpayers from unacceptably high bills, as well as to control the level of public expenditure. It is therefore essential to maintain both next year and in our new system effective arrangements to ensure proper restraint in local spending and taxation.

Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future structure of local government on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement to the House on 23 April, *Official Report*, column 901, in which I set out the Government's proposals for the structure of local government in England. We believe that the structure of two tiers outside London and the metropolitan county areas needs to be reviewed. We therefore propose to establish a new, independent local government commission to draw up recommendations for improving the structure of local government area by area, taking account of local views and the costs and benefits of the change. This commission would consult on its recommendations and submit them to me. Final decisions would rest with Parliament.

Urban Programme

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes in the inner area programme and urban regeneration funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: In February we issued annual programme guidance for the urban programme for 1992-93 which encourages greater targeting of resources on smaller areas; continued emphasis on economic projects; packaging of resources with other public and private sector funds; and partnerships with other key participants in inner city regeneration. The quality of programmes brought forward by authorities will be taken into account in distributing the final allocation of resources.

London Docklands

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for each year since 1981 the total expenditure by the London Docklands development corporation on *(a)* the provision of new units of social housing and *(b)* housing improvement or refurbishment.

Mr. Key: The information requested is provided in the following tables:

(a) New social housing units

	£ million
1981-82	0
1982-83	0
1983-84	3·3
1984-85	0
1985-86	0
1986-87	0

	£ million
1987-88	0
1988-89	50·5
1989-90	43·7
1990-91	27·0
TOTAL	[1]124·5

[1] Not including contributions made in form of land sold at social housing use values.

(b) Housing improvement or refurbishment

	£ million
1981-82	0
1982-83	0·4
1983-84	0·4
1984-85	0
1985-86	0·2
1986-87	1·7
1987-88	2·3
1988-89	6·8
1989-90	2·8
1990-91	8·5
TOTAL	23·1

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many new jobs, not including transferred jobs, have been created as a result of the London docklands urban development area since 1981;

(2) how many jobs attracted to the London docklands UDA since 1981 have been transferred from areas outside that UDA;

(3) what was the number of people unemployed in the London docklands UDA for 1981 and 1991;

(4) how many jobs have been attracted to the London docklands urban development area in total; and if he will break down these jobs to the board categories of the standard industrial classification;

(5) how many people were employed in the London docklands UDA in 1981 and 1991;

(6) how many jobs have been lost in the London docklands UDA since 1981; and if he will break down these jobs to the broad categories of the standard industrial classification;

(7) what is his estimate of the percentage of the jobs attracted to the London docklands UDA that have been secured by residents of *(a)* London docklands UDA and *(b)* the London boroughs of Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Newham.

Mr. Key: LDDC's 1990 employment survey showed 48,102 people in permanent employment, together with a further 4,982 employed on temporary construction. Of the total at least 41,421 jobs, or 78 per cent., had come into the LDDC area since 1981.

Jobs by Standard Industrial Classifications were as follows:

SIC	Employees
0 Agriculture, Fishing etc	54
1 Energy and Water Supply	323
2 Minerals, chemicals etc	237
3 Metal goods, vehicle industries	798
4 Other manufacturing	7,968
5 Construction	5,805
6 Distribution, hotels, catering	6,076
7 Transport and communication	2,959
8 Banking, finance, business services	9,824
9 Other services	4,594
Not known	2,783
Total	41,421

Of these, an estimated 16,862 were in newly created businesses and 24,559 in companies that relocated from elsewhere. There are no comprehensive figures for the place of residence of those employed in the LDDC area, nor for the classification of jobs lost since 1981. The figures suggest that by 1990 some 15,000 jobs had been lost or moved away.

An estimated 3,553 people were unemployed in 1981, compared to 3,744 in March 1991, while over the same period the population increased by about 60 per cent.

By March the number of permanent jobs had increased to 53,000, together with jobs in construction. The total is more than double the figure for 1981, 27,213, and demonstrates the scale of economic and physical regeneration already achieved by the corporation.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will provide details for each financial year since 1981 of expenditure by the London Docklands development corporation on *(a)* public transport infrastructure and *(b)* road infrastructure;

(2) what was the total expenditure of the London Docklands development corporation in the years 1981-91 on *(a)* staff salaries and related expenditure, *(b)* administration costs, *(c)* estates maintenance, *(d)* environmental improvements, *(e)* land acquisition, *(f)* land reclamation, *(g)* utilities, *(h)* roads, *(i)* industry support, *(j)* community support, *(k)* housing, *(l)* the docklands light railway and *(m)* promotions and publicity;

(3) if he will supply for each financial year since 1981 figures for the income received by the London Docklands development corporation from the sale of land and property;

(4) what was the total expenditure by the London Docklands development corporation in each financial year since 1981;

(5) if he will calculate the total amount of public expenditure allocated to the London Docklands development corporation urban development area since 1981 including *(a)* grant in aid to the London Docklands development corporation, *(b)* expenditure by virtue of the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone, *(c)* public expenditure on road and transport infrastructure schemes by central Government Departments and *(d)* all other expenditure by central Government Departments, broken down by category.

Mr. Key: The information available is provided in the table. Expenditure for the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone was £19·70 million up to 31 March 1990 in respect of rate revenue forgone.

Information on capital cost allowances for individual enterprise zones and on public expenditure by central Government Departments is not available.

LDDC income and expenditure

£ million

	1981-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	Total
Expenditure										
Staff salaries etc.		3	4	4	5	5	6	8	9	
Administration		5	6	6	6	6	7	7	8	
Estates maintenance		2	2	2	3	3	6	6	7	
	10	10	12	12	14	14	19	21	24	136
Environmental	5	6	4	5	7	7	17	9	12	72
Land acquisition	35	17	4	5	13	23	16	30	12	155
Land reclamation	8	10	15	15	14	15	16	15	5	113
Utilities	5	6	5	6	15	18	35	32	20	142
Roads	6	8	4	7	16	34	55	65	149	344
Industry support community support	2	4	5	4	4	5	9	11	21	65
Housing	1	2	—	—	—	—	45	67	32	147
DLR	—	1	16	13	6	2	8	33	79	158
Promotion and publicity	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3
Gross expenditure	72	64	65	67	89	118	220	283	357	1,335
Income										
Sales of land and property	2	—	5	13	22	41	133	32	27	275
Grant in aid	72	63	59	54	65	83	116	256	333	1,101
Other income	1	3	2	1	2	2	1	3	3	18
Total income	75	66	66	68	89	126	250	291	363	1,394

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people who have received training from new training schemes set up by the London Docklands development corporation have secured employment in new businesses in the London Docklands UDA.

Mr. Key: No comparative figures are available. LDDC and the training providers it supports are improving their reporting systems, but it is difficult to monitor in detail the eventual consequences of training for every individual trainee.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for each parcel of land currently in the ownership of the London Docklands development corporation details of *(a)* the date of acquisition, *(b)* from whom it was acquired, *(c)* the method of acquisition and *(d)* the price paid per acre.

Mr. Key: No. These are commercially confidential.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many units of residential accommodation have been completed in the London Docklands UDA since 1981; and, of these, how many have been built on land owned by the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Key: At March 1991, 15,220 new units had been completed, of which 8,367 were on land owned by LDDC.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list for each financial year since 1981 the total amount of land in the ownership of the London Docklands development corporation at the end of each year;

(2) if he will supply figures for each financial year since 1981 for the amount of land that has been sold by the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Key: This information is given in the table.

LDDC land disposals and holdings

	Disposed to developers in year (acres)[1]	*Land holdings at end of financial year (acres)*[2]
1981-82	—	657
1982-83	33	755
1983-84	54	1,128
1984-85	178	1,082
1985-86	185	1,379
1986-87	85	1,441
1987-88	43	1,394
1988-89	22	1,375
1989-90	25	1,442
1990-91	36	1,448

[1] Includes plot by plot housing disposal.
[2] Includes water and land earmarked for environmental and roads use.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will supply details of the current use of each parcel of land in the ownership of the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Key: The details requested are as follows:

	Acres
Water	401
Public assets and environmental work	483
Available for disposal	564
TOTAL LAND HOLDING	1,448

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those public transport infrastructure schemes funded to date by the London Docklands development corporation, giving the amount of London Docklands development corporation expenditure involved.

Mr. Key: The following list outlines the public infrastructure expenditure to 31 March 1991.

	£ million
Initial Docklands light railway construction	40·0
Docklands light railway Beckton extension	122·7

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the latest figures for the total number of private residential properties that have been built in the London docklands UDA that remain unsold or unoccupied.

Mr. Key: As at June 1990 1,422 units of all tenures were unsold or unoccupied, out of a total stock of approximately 14,000 new build units. No tenure breakdown is available.

Taxpayers (Great Grimsby)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby his estimate of the number of taxpayers, the gross amount payable and the ratio of the standard tax to average incomes of householders in each of the proposed council tax bands.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for Great Grimsby his estimate of the number of mobile homes, the basis on which they are to be valued, and the responsibility for payment in the case of mobile homes sited in a commercial caravan park.

Mr. Key: Information on the number of mobile homes in Great Grimsby is not available.

Under the present local grant finance system mobile homes which are someone's sole or main residence are domestic property and their occupants are liable to the community charge.

Right to Buy

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the number of right-to-buy sales completed in each local authority in England since the Housing Act 1980 come into force.

Sir George Young: A table showing the reported number of right-to-buy sales for each English local authority between October 1980 and December 1991 was placed in the Library on 18 April 1991, *Official Report*, Volume 189, column *227*.

Housing Investment Programme

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing, for each local authority in England, the *(a)* 1990-91 housing investment programme bid and *(b)* 1990-91 housing investment programme allocation of capital spending.

Sir George Young: A table listing housing investment programme allocations for 1990-91 for each housing authority in England was placed in the Library on 21 December 1989. A table showing proposals for gross capital expenditure on housing investment in 1990-91, submitted by authorities to the Department, has now been placed in the Library.

Authorities' own proposals for housing capital expenditure are not directly comparable with each other, nor with the HIP allocation figure because the proposals may not have been prepared on a consistent basis as regards overall strategy for meeting needs, for the financing of works, or their costing or phasing. Moreover, the allocations do not represent a borrowing approval, which is conferred through each authority's all-service basic credit approval, and as such they take no account of the receipts available to individual authorities or the amount of those receipts they may choose to spend on housing.

Ancient Murrelet

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will assist efforts to protect the ancient murrelet sea bird that has returned to Lundy island.

Mr. Trippier: As a natural visitor to Britain, the ancient murrelet is fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is further protected from molestation and disturbance by bye-laws applying to the Lundy marine nature reserve.

Free-running Snares

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Government have to ensure that the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 regulating free-running snares are adhered to.

Mr. Trippier: Strict penalties of fines of up to £2,000 for each offence are already available to the courts to assist in enforcing the provisions regulating snares under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There will be provision in the Criminal Justice Bill to increase the level of fine to £5,000. Police forces are well aware of the legislation controlling wildlife and in many cases have appointed officers who take a special interest in this area.

Floodlighting

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will list *(a)* public buildings and *(b)* parks and squares in London which are floodlit at night at Her Majesty's Government's expense;

(2) what is the cost to Her Majesty's Government each year of flood-lighting in *(a)* public buildings and *(b)* parks and squares in London.

Sir George Young: This information is not held centrally.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state for the financial year 1990-91 how much is still outstanding for collection in the Doncaster metropolitan borough council area in respect of the uniform business rate; and what percentage this represents of the total uniform business rate for the Doncaster metropolitan borough council area.

Mr. Key: By 31 March 1991 Doncaster metropolitan borough council had collected £36·6 million in non-domestic rates, equivalent to 92 per cent. of its provisional contribution to the non-domestic rates pool. My Department does not yet have information about the amount of non-domestic rates collectable by the authority and therefore about the amount of rates outstanding.

Severe Weather

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance the Government gave to Doncaster metropolitan borough council to meet additional expenditure incurred following the bad weather during this last winter.

Mr. Key: None. The council has not requested any assistance and we have no information to suggest that it incurred costs greater than those which it could be expected to meet as part of its normal responsibilities for coping with winter weather.

Housing Grants

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision is being made by his Department for housing grants payable by the Housing Corporation in the financial year 1991-92; and what are the rates of grant.

Mr. Yeo: Provision for housing grants payable by the Housing Corporation is made in supply estimates, class VIII, vote 1, section A. For 1991-92, net provision is £2,320,715,000.

The rates of grant payable on capital projects will be published very shortly by Housing Corporation circular, and I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library.

Manpower Watch

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what objectives were set for the manpower watch for local government in 1979; what has been the actual and percentage fall in local government manpower since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The joint staffing watch, formerly joint manpower watch, was set up in 1975 as part of the 1974-75 rate support grant settlement. In describing the purpose of the new system, DOE circular 30/75 stated:

"The new arrangements . . . are intended to reinforce the severe restriction on the rate of growth in current expenditure by establishing the means of identifying at regular intervals fluctuations in the total numbers employed by local authorities. The aim is to establish machinery through which all parties to the Rate Support Grant settlement can jointly satisfy themselves that any increases in employment are consistent with national policies and priorities."

Staff costs form a large proportion of local authority expenditure and the Government still consider it necessary to maintain a close watch on local authority staffing levels.

The fall in local government staffing from December 1979 to December 1990 has been 71,350 full-time equivalents, that is, 3·6 per cent.

Environmental Protection Act

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to implement part II of the Environmental Protection Act.

Mr. Trippier: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Unemployment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the direct and indirect effect on local authority expenditure on services of each increase of 100,000 in unemployment; and what proportion of the increase in expenditure is borne by central Government.

Mr. Key: There is no evidence of a direct link between levels of unemployment and local authority expenditure. It is for each authority to decide its spending priorities across the range of its services according to the circumstances of its area. Central Government support, which this year amounts to about 85 per cent. of total standard spending, should enable all authorities to provide a standard level of service, taking into account their individual circumstances.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Nature Conservancy Council on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: There was no expenditure by the Nature Conservancy Council on items *(a)* to *(c)* during the period 1979-80 to 1990-91, nor does the Nature Conservancy Council for England plan any in 1991-92. Expenditure by the two bodies on *(d)* for the period 1989-90 to 1991-92 is in the table. Figures for previous years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	£
1989-90	20,896
1990-91	4,972
1991-92	[1]7,500

[1] Planned by Nature Conservancy Council for England.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Ordnance Survey on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Baldry: Information on advertising expenditure prior to 1985-86 cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. Records since 1985-86 are not held in the detail requested. Information on full advertising expenditure is as follows:

	£(000)
1985-86	350·0
1986-87	402·5
1987-88	389·1
1988-89	313·1
1989-90	321·0
1990-91	345·0

The advertising budget for 1991-92 is £348,900.

Both television and radio advertising campaigns were used early in the period when approximately 50 per cent.

of the total expenditure was allocated to them. In recent years the full expenditure has been for advertising in the trade press and national and local newspapers. Expenditure on other promotional material is included in the figures given in my reply on 3 May 1991.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Countryside Commission on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Trippier: These figures cannot be supplied without disproportionate cost.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for the privatisation of any activities of the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has no plans to make any such proposals.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figure was added to the revenue support grant in respect of the exemption from rates of properties in enterprise zones for 1990-91 and 1991-92; and how the figure was calculated.

Mr. Key: No addition, as such, was required. The exemption of properties in enterprise zones results in a lower national total of non-domestic rate income, but the value of exemptions is not separately identified. For any total of external support distributed to local authorities in a year, any reduction in the size of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates is automatically offset by an increase in revenue support grant which is then distributed to authorities in accordance with their standard spending assessments.

Travel Patterns

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what progress has been made in the study promised in "This Common Inheritance" of the relationship between development and travel patterns and ways of locating development to reduce travel distances and to increase transport choice;

(2) when he will issue the planning guidance proposed in paragraph 6.35 of "This Common Inheritance".

Sir George Young: The Departments of Transport and the Environment have jointly commissioned this research. The contract was let to ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. with Transportation Planning Associates in mid-Febuary and will be completed by the end of May 1992. The project is still at an early stage.

The environment White Paper proposes that the research should lead to planning policy guidance. The Departments would normally expect to publish the results of the research, usually within six months of receiving the final report. Depending on the findings and conclusions of the research, my Department would hope to have draft planning policy guidance for consultation by late 1992.

Green House Demonstration Programme

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the green house demonstration programme.

Mr. Yeo: The response of local authorities to the green house programme for energy efficiency in local authority housing has been very encouraging. In the first round 165 authorities submitted more than 350 bids. As announced on April 10, over 70 schemes, including a "flagship" of particular interest in each region, will be supported in 1991-92.

Applications for support under the programme for 1992-93 will be invited shortly.

Wath Recycling

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the particular noxious materials which continue to be held by Wath Recycling at Wath upon Dearne, Rotherham.

Mr. Baldry: Wath Recycling handles a range of materials in daily operations under the terms of its licence and subject to monitoring and inspection by the regulatory authorities. The particular waste from the USA now stored on the site contains a range of benzene compounds, such as xylenes.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the fire which took place at the Wath Recycling works on 29 April; what assessment he has made of the potential dangers as a result of that incident; and what was the actual distance of the fire from the nearest of those containers which hold the toxic waste of which he is aware.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The fire at the Wath Recycling works, Rotherham, on 29 April 1991 was associated with a furnace in which a vegetable fat was being burnt off from a mixture of the fat and a solid nickel-containing catalyst.

The process is subject to control by HMIP for emissions to atmosphere and is a registered incineration works.

Molten and burning fat escaped from the furnace. The fire was totally contained in the building and in the immediate vicinity of the furnace.

Apart from the normal hazards associated with fire at the time of the incident no further potential dangers are anticipated.

The distance from the building to the stored drummed waste, which had been imported from the USA in 1989, is approximately 18 yd. At no time was there a danger of those drums being involved in the incident.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many mortgage repossessions there have been in *(a)* the city of York and *(b)* the county of North Yorkshire during each of the last 12 months for which records are available; and what were the annual figures for each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Yeo: Comprehensive information on mortgage repossessions in the city of York and the county of North Yorkshire, including properties surrendered without a court order, is not available.

The available figures for possession orders made by the courts covering York and the county of North Yorkshire, not all of which are executed, are as follows:

Mortgage possession orders

	York	*County of North Yorkshire*
1987	269	475
1988	238	393
1989	193	401
1990	314	623

Global Warming

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate how many centimetres the sea level of the channel would rise given *(a)* a 1·5 deg. C rise in global average surface temperature and *(b)* a 4·5 deg. C rise in global average surface temperature.

Mr. Trippier: Estimates of sea level rise due to global warming depend on how rapidly the warming takes place. In the scientific assessment report of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, the "business-as-usual" scenario gives temperatures of 1·5 and 4·5 deg. C above present at some time between 2090 and 2100 for the high and low sensitivity cases respectively. Corresponding average sea level rises are about 30 and 100 cm. At the channel coast vertical land movements would add about 30 cm to the relative sea level rise over the next century.

Environmental and Energy Efficiency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to issue a planning policy guidance to local authorities note regarding environmental and energy efficiency factors.

Mr. Yeo: Existing planning policy guidance notes already give advice on a range of environmental issues; and we intend to expand the PPG series to include guidance on planning and pollution and on renewable energy sources. My right hon. Friend will consider the need for guidance on energy efficiency in determining, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, the Government's response to recommendation 21 in the third report from the Energy Select Committee.

Walkers

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about improved access to countryside for walkers.

Mr. Trippier: The best way of improving access to the countryside is through the existing, extensive rights of way network. This is why we endorsed in the environment White Paper the Countryside Commission's target of ensuring that the whole network is readily available for use by the year 2000.

Water Quality

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will issue guidance to local authorities on the planning considerations associated with the water companies' investment to improve the quality of bathing and drinking waters and to construct new water treatment works; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today issued for public consultation a draft circular about the planning implications for local authorities, of substantial investment by the water industry to improve the quality of bathing and drinking waters. Comments have been invited from the local authority associations, the water companies and other representative bodies.

The draft circular stresses the urgency of improving the quality of bathing and drinking waters, and emphasises local planning authorities' responsibility to work with the water industry to find suitable sites for sewage treatment works and to handle planning applications without delay.

Property Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to a nine-band property tax as a means of financing local government.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* The Government considered many possibilities before proposing that the council tax should be based on the seven bands of property value announced on 23 April.

National Environment Week

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the events connected with National Environment Week in which he will be participating.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was invited to launch National Environment Week on Wednesday 8 May, but was unable to do so: he has asked me to carry out the launch on his behalf. I shall be participating in an event associated with Mid Bedfordshire district council's contribution to National Environment Week on 21 May.

Archaeological Remains

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require planning authorities in England to inform solicitors making their local searches if there are archaeological remains present on the land.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* No. Any archaeological remains which are scheduled as ancient monuments under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 are registered as a local land charge and can be identified in local searches.

Details of non-scheduled sites of known archaeological interest are registered on the sites and monuments record held by county councils—English Heritage for London—and can be consulted by anyone.

Guidance has been issued to all planning authorities—DOE Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning—which emphasises the availability of the sites and monuments record and encourages both developers and planning authorities to consult it when considering potential development.

Poll Tax Capping

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reply to an appeal against proposed poll tax capping by Warwickshire county council; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 3 May 1991]:* We intend to lay a draft order setting out the final cap for Warwickshire and the other authorities which have challenged their proposed caps before the House as soon as possible. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 May by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), *Official Report*, column *336*.

Aggregates

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the long-term forecast of demand for aggregates.

Mr. Yeo *[pursuant to his reply, 7 May Official Report, column 401]:* In announcing the publication of the long-term forecasts of demand for aggregates I should like to make it clear that the figures of 421 million tonnes per annum and 490 million tonnes per annum referred to in the second paragraph relate to the forecast in 2011 and not 2001 as stated.

SCOTLAND

Community Charge

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the maximum payment of community charge, including community water charge, payable by pensioners on the basic retirement pension in 1991-92 for each local authority area in Scotland and the average bill across Scotland; and if he will express each sum payable as a percentage of the total community charge in the area.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Single pensioners and some pensioner couples in receipt only of the basic state retirement pension—currently £52 per week plus £31·25 per week for a dependent partner—with no other source of income—for example, other state benefits—and savings of £3,000 or less, are entitled to the maximum community charge benefit of 80 per cent. of the personal community charge for the area. Some pensioner couples aged from 60 to 74 who are in receipt of only the basic state retirement pension for a couple, with no other income and savings of £3,000 or less, are entitled to benefit levels of 39p per year less than the maximum benefit. No benefit is awarded in respect of the personal community water charge or the standard community charge. The amount payable by a pensioner on maximum benefit by local authority area is shown in the table.

Authority	*20 per cent. of total personal community charge*	*Personal community Water charge*	*Amount payable*	*As Percentage of full personal charge plus water charge*
	£	£	£	
Berwickshire	26·80	30	56·80	34·6
Ettrick and Lauderdale	29·60	30	59·60	33·5
Roxburgh	29·00	30	59·00	33·7
Tweedale	28·20	30	58·20	34·0
Clackmannan	55·40	15	70·40	24·1
Falkirk	41·60	15	56·60	25·4
Stirling	54·40	15	69·40	24·2
Annandale and Eskdale	34·40	32	66·40	32·5
Nithsdale	34·40	32	66·40	32·5
Stewartry	30·60	32	62·60	33·8
Wigtown	33·00	32	65·00	33·0
Dunfermline	48·80	21	69·80	26·3
Kirkcaldy	49·00	21	70·00	26·3
North East Fife	50·80	21	71·80	26·1
Aberdeen City	45·40	39	84·40	31·7
Banff and Buchan	35·20	39	74·20	34·5
Gordon	31·80	39	70·80	35·8
Kincardine and Deeside	28·00	39	67·00	37·4
Moray	30·40	39	69·40	36·3
Badenoch and Strathspey	28·40	35	63·40	35·8
Caithness	27·40	35	62·40	36·3
Inverness	27·40	35	62·40	36·3
Lochaber	33·40	35	68·40	33·9
Nairn	28·00	35	63·00	36·0
Ross and Cromarty	32·80	35	67·80	34·1
Skye and Lochalsh	29·00	35	64·00	35·6
Sutherland	29·80	35	64·80	35·2
East Lothian	75·20	26	101·20	25·2
Edinburgh City	83·60	26	109·60	24·7
Midlothian	72·80	26	98·80	25·3
West Lothian	68·60	26	94·60	25·6
Argyll and Bute	47·60	29	76·60	28·7
Bearsden and Milngavie	45·20	29	74·20	29·1
Clydebank	54·60	29	83·60	27·7
Clydesdale	48·40	29	77·40	28·6
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	42·20	29	71·20	29·7
Cumnock and Doon Valley	42·80	29	71·80	29·5
Cumminghame	50·60	29	79·60	28·2
Dumbarton	58·20	29	87·20	27·2

Authority	20 per cent. of total personal community charge	Personal community Water charge	Amount payable	As Percentage of full personal charge plus water charge
	£	£	£	
East Kilbride	52·20	29	81·20	28·0
Eastwood	38·40	29	67·40	30·4
Glasgow City	53·20	29	82·20	27·9
Hamilton	49·60	29	78·60	28·4
Inverclyde	46·40	29	75·40	28·9
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	44·80	29	73·80	29·2
Kyle and Carrick	52·50	29	81·50	28·0
Monklands	49·80	29	78·80	28·3
Motherwell	40·40	29	74·40	29·1
Renfrew	52·40	29	81·40	28·0
Strathkelvin	50·00	29	79·00	28·3
Angus	43·80	26	69·80	28·5
Dundee City	53·80	26	78·80	27·1
Perth and Kinross	45·40	26	71·40	28·2
Orkney	00·40	53	53·40	97·1
Shetland	00·19	44·07	44·26	98·4
Western Isles	05·20	51	56·20	73·0
Scotland average	50·60	29	79·60	28·2

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the cost to date of the printing and issuing of poll tax collection books; and what was the cost of re-issuing new poll tax collection notices and books following the Budget changes in poll tax levels;

(2) what is his estimate of the total cost to date of the publication and distribution of poll tax registration forms;

(3) what is his estimate of the total cost of printing and distributing (i) poll tax reminder forms and (ii) sheriff officer warrants;

(4) what is his estimate of the cost of computer equipment for the administration of poll tax registers for each of the regions of Scotland;

(5) what is his estimate of the staffing costs of poll tax registration officers.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Based on local authorities' own budget estimates, the cost of community charge registration in 1991-92 will be £18·6 million and the cost of collecting the charge will be £43 million. No further breakdown of these figures is held centrally.

The Scottish Office Environment Department plans to discuss with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities the additional administrative costs which local authorities will face in issuing revised 1991-92 bills following the passage of the Community Charges (General Reductions) Act 1991.

Council Tax

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how claims for personal discounts in respect of the council tax are to be checked by local authorities.

Mr. Lang: This is a matter for consultation.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if estate agents will be used by the valuation office of the Inland Revenue to assign properties to bands during the initial banding process for the council tax;

(2) what role the regional assessors will play in the initial banding of properties for the new council tax;

(3) if he will list the private sector professionals to be used by the valuation office of the Inland Revenue in the initial banding of properties for the council tax, as referred to in paragraph 2.29 of the Government's consultation paper.

Mr. Lang: Consultations are continuing on the arrangements for valuing properties for the council tax and final decisions have still to be taken.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give an estimate for the proportion of householders who will appeal against the band they are assigned to during the initial valuation process for the Government's council tax.

Mr. Lang: It is not possible to forecast the number of appeals which might be made as a result of the initial valuation process for the council tax. A banding system should lead to fewer appeals than any system, such as rates, which is based upon individual valuations, and will reduce the need for revaluations.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how local authorities will reassess liability for the council tax if someone moves into or out of a property during the course of the year.

Mr. Lang: While the Government see some attractions in an annual basis of liability, except in clearly defined circumstances such as the death of someone in the household, a final decision will be taken in light of consultation.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland will pay the council tax; and how many people in Scotland paid rates in the last year when they were levied.

Mr. Lang: The number of domestic properties which were potentially subject to rates in 1988-89 was 2·1 million. This figure includes, however, empty properties and other properties in respect of which no rates were payable. Under the council tax, the householder will be responsible for paying a single bill for each household and the number of people directly liable to pay the tax will, therefore, be equivalent to the number of households that there are when the tax is introduced, less adjustments for households for which no tax is payable. The personal element of the tax will ensure that about 90 per cent. of adults in Scotland will be taken into account by the new tax.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether there will be additional funding from central Government to fund the relief scheme referred to in paragraph 8.2 of the Government's consultation paper on the council tax.

Mr. Lang: This matter will be decided at a later date.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of domestic residences in each of the property value bands of the proposed council tax in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The table gives the estimates used for the calculation of illustrative council tax bills for Scotland.

Property value band in relation to average capital value	*Upper property value in band* £	*Number of properties in Scotland (thousand)*
A. under 50 per cent.	27,000	428
B. 50 to 65 per cent.	35,000	309
C. 65 to 85 per cent.	45,000	426
D. 85 to 110 per cent.	58,000	310
E. 110 to 150 per cent.	80,000	273
F. 150 to 200 per cent.	106,000	161
G. over 200 per cent.	over 106,000	183
Total all bands		2,090

Hospices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the financial contribution made to each hospice in Strathclyde region in each year since 1984.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Records of financial allocations to hospices by health boards are not held centrally.

Dentists

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children were on the dental general practitioner capitation scheme within the Glasgow postal area from 1 October 1990 to 31 March 1991; and if he will give the number in each postal district within Glasgow.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available centrally. During the period 1 October 1990 to 31 March 1991, a total of 114,572 children in the Greater Glasgow health board area were registered with general dental practitioners under capitation arrangements.

Testing (Primary Schools)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is Her Majesty's Government's policy regarding the criteria for weighting compulsory tests against conflicting results of continuous assessment as they affect primary four and seven-year-old schoolchildren.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Guidance to teachers on this matter is given in the Scottish Office Education Department working paper No. 5 "The Framework for National Testing in 1991", a copy of which is in the Library.

Burglaries

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many burglaries there were in Paisley, North in each of the last three years; and what percentage those were of all reported crimes in the area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Forestry Commission on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission has not spent any money on television or radio advertising. Its local offices have advertised open days and similar events in local newspapers, but information on the costs involved is not held centrally. The central expenditure by the commission on promotional material for each year from 1987 is given in the table, rounded to the nearest £10,000. Figures for previous years are no longer available.

Year ended 31 March	*Expenditure £*
1987	120,000
1988	160,000
1989	[1]310,000
1990	240,000
1991	220,000
1992	[2]260,000

[1] The expenditure in 1988-89 included promotional material produced in connection with the Forestry Commission's exhibit at the Glasgow Garden Festival.
[2] Budget.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Scottish Development Agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1990-91 and budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise, which succeeded the Scottish Development Agency on 1 April 1991, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Decommissioning

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions were held relevant to the production by his Department of a decommissioning scheme for the fishing industry in 1989; and if he will place a copy of his proposed scheme in the Library.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government made no proposals for a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme in 1989.

Community Care

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to introduce the care in the community programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the written answer which my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on 18 July 1990.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to pass the care in the community proposals into health board control.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* The Government's policy on responsibilities for community care remains as set out in the White Paper "Caring for People" and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Museum of Flight

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to make it possible for one of the last Shackletons to become an exhibit at the National Museum of Scotland's museum of flight at East Fortune.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* It is for the board of trustees of the national museums of Scotland to decide on acquisitions for the museums within the terms of their own collection policies.

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures for 1990 showing the estimated percentage of women delivering in Scotland whose deliveries were *(a)* spontaneous, including abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous, *(b)* instrumental, including forceps, vacuum and breech extractions, *(c)* caesarean section and *(d)* other and unspecified means.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The information is as follows.

Births	*Per cent.*
(a) Spontaneous delivery	72·6
(b) Instrumental delivery	12·7
(c) Caesarean section	14·6
(d) Other and unspecified delivery	00·1

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures for 1990 showing the estimated percentage of women delivering in Scotland *(a)* whose labours were induced, *(b)* whose labours were of spontaneous onset and *(c)* who had elective caesarean section.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The information is as follows.

Births	*Per cent.*
(a) Induced labour	21·0
(b) Spontaneous onset of labour	73·7
(c) Elective Caesarean section	05·3

Pregnancy Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures for 1990 of the number of clinics in Scotland offering (i) IVF, GIFT and other procedures and (ii) GIFT and other procedures but excluding IVF.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 22 October 1990.

The 1991 annual report of the interim licensing authority, to be published later this year, is expected to contain the latest available information about clinics offering these procedures.

Dounreay

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the possible sites at which Nirex proposes to drill holes or use explosive charges for a seismic survey of Dounreay as part of the proposed preliminary trial;

(2) what information he has on the total estimated cost of drilling 200 to 240 boreholes as envisaged by Nirex as part of the preliminary trial at Dounreay; what is the estimated cost incurred in carrying out a single borehole; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The technical and commercial details of the seismic survey are operational matters for the chairman of UK Nirex Ltd. and I have arranged for him to write to the hon. Lady with the information requested. I will also arrange for a copy of this letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultation he intends to hold concerning any decision to extend the number of boreholes after the preliminary trial in which Nirex proposes to drill 200 to 240 boreholes and use explosive charges for seismic survey of Dounreay.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* None. UK Nirex Ltd. has planning permission to drill up to 6,000 shot-holes as part of its seismic survey. The eventual number and location of shot-holes are now for Nirex, subject to compliance with the conditions attached to my right hon. Friend's decision. These conditions require Nirex to consult the planning authority and the local authority environmental health department and to notify all occupiers of land within the survey area of the position of boreholes where explosives are to be used.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the comparative costings of Dounreay and Sellafield for the siting of an underground nuclear waste repository; if he will set out the reasons for upholding the Nirex appeal against Highland regional council's planning refusal for further test boring at Dounreay; and if he will now indicate the likely time scale involved for such test boring and an eventual decision on the siting of any proposed nuclear waste repository; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* UK Nirex Ltd. estimates that the comparative costs at current prices are:

£ billion

Site	*Repository costs*	*Transport costs*[1]
Dounreay	2·4	1·9
Sellafield	2·5	0·75

[1] These figures include new transport infrastructure costs.

The reasons for my right hon. Friend's decision to uphold the Nirex appeal are set out in his decision letter of 29 April, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

I understand from Nirex that the seismic tests will be carried out over the next 4 to 6 months. It hopes to be in a position at the end of 1991 to identify a preferred site, which will then be subject to more detailed investigations.

Any resultant proposal to build a deep repository will be subject to a full public inquiry.

Community Care, Fife

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from Fife health board on its discussions with Fife regional council on the appropriate financial arrangements for the development of community care in Fife; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* I have asked health boards and local authority social work departments to submit planning agreements to me by 1 July 1991. These statements will indicate what agreements health boards and local authorities have reached on their respective responsibilities for obtaining community care; and what financial resources each will provide towards obtaining such care.

Mentally Handicapped People (Health Services)

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the policy adopted by his Department to ensure that funds released by the closure or contraction of hospitals for the mentally handicapped are wholly and speedily devoted to alternative forms of care.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* On 7 March I announced a bridging finance scheme which is designed to do just that. The scheme makes £15 million available to health boards to meet the increased costs of maintaining hospital services while community support services are being developed.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 9 May 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Antarctica

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the records available in the Public Records Office relating to military activity in Antarctica; and how many papers relating to Antarctica have been withheld for more than 30 years.

The Attorney-General: No list is maintained of records available in the Public Records Office relating specifically to Antarctica or military activity there. To compile such a list, or to enumerate all related papers withheld for more than 30 years could be done only at disproportionate expense.

TRANSPORT

Smoky Vehicles

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport further to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *417*, whether he will publish and publicise the telephone numbers of the Department of Transport area departments dealing with complaints about smoky vehicles, subject to operator licensing; what checks operators of allegedly smoky vehicles will be required to undertake in order to satisfy his Department that the vehicle is not smoky; and what follow-up action his Department will take if an unsatisfactory reply is received.

Mr. Chope: The telephone numbers of the Department of Transport's traffic area offices are:

	telephone number
Birmingham	021 631 3300
Bristol	0272 297221
Cambridge	0223 358922
Cardiff	0222 394027
Eastbourne (covers London)	0323 21471
Edinburgh	031 225 5494
Leeds	0532 499433
Manchester	061 872 5077

Telephone numbers are in telephone directories or available from directory inquiries. The Department's new leaflet 'Traffic Areas—the New Boundaries and Offices' gives addresses, telephone numbers and boundaries of traffic area offices. It will shortly be available, free of charge, from the public inquiry unit of the Department in London, telephone 071 276 0800.

All operators subject to operator licensing must have adequate arrangements for vehicle maintenance. They will have to diagnose the cause of the excessive smoke and report back on what, if any, action has been taken. If the response from the operator is unsatisfactory, the vehicle inspectorate will review the adequacy of the operators' maintenance arrangements and inspect the vehicle if necessary.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the proposed M11 link road, as planned, could safely be used by (i) pedestrians and (ii) cyclists.

Mr. Chope: The A12, Hackney Wick-M11 link road will be an all-purpose urban trunk road and will be heavily trafficked. The link road will remove motor traffic from existing roads and these will become safer alternative routes for pedestrians and cyclists when linked by the footpaths and cycletracks which are part of the scheme.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if construction drawings in connection with the M11 link road for the Lea interchange have yet been made.

Mr. Chope: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 23 April, at columns *415-16*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what evidence was given on 8 January 1990, before the compulsory purchase order public inquiry in connection with the M11 link road, by the Department of Transport's representative on proposed restrictions on cycling on the road;

(2) if he will review the implications of paragraph 80 of the decision letter dated 2 August 1988 concerning the M11 link road, in respect of safety considerations and the use by cyclists of the M11 link road in the light of his representation to the EC Commission that the road will be available for use by all classes of traffic.

Mr. Chope: The evidence referred to previous proposals to restrict the use of the link road by cyclists and to provide alternatives which would be more attractive. It acknowledged that a prohibition might be necessary ultimately, but pointed out that this would not be inconsistent with the classification of the link road as an all-purpose trunk road. This is in accordance with both the intentions of paragraph 80 of the decision letter of 2 August 1988 and the Department's response to the EC of November last year.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what undertakings Her Majesty's Government has given in connection with the M11 link road to the Commission of the European Communities on availability for use by all classes of traffic.

Mr. Chope: The Department has informed the European Commission that, on opening, the link road will be available to all classes of traffic.

Rail Network (Tourism)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will direct British Rail to prepare proposals to develop the rail network on routes helpful to the tourist industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The commercial development of rail services in tourist areas was among the objectives set by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) in writing to the then chairman of British Rail on 19 December 1989.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the channel tunnel rail link report from British Rail; if he will now make the report public; and if he will make a statement on the Government's decision.

Mr. Rifkind: I received the report on 3 May, but still await some of the supporting material. It is too soon to say when it will be possible to announce a decision. Publishing the report now could cause blight on all the routes that were studied.

Chemical Containers (Norfolk Coast)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has ordered an investigation into the incident in which dangerous chemical containers drifted on to the north Norfolk coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine accident investigation branch has appointed an inspector to investigate the incident. The containers appear to be part of the cargo of a Swedish registered vessel, the Nordic Pride, which reported the loss of four deck cargo tanks in bad weather on Friday 3 May 1991.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Gloucester Prison

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out a timetable for improvements to the facilities at Gloucester prison.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Work costing just over £1 million will start this year on a two-year programme to provide access to night sanitation for all inmates. Work costing about £1 million is also due to start in 1991-92 on new facilities for education and to improve fire safety. A strategy for the further development of the prison is being prepared and £3 million has been allocated for work arising from this, starting in 1993-94.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The readily available information about the appointments for which I am responsible, a number of which will fall to be made in 1991 and 1992, is given in "Public Bodies 1990" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library.

Police Force Numbers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each police authority in Wales, the number of police officers authorised by his Department, the number of police officer posts in the authority's establishment and the number actually in post for each of the past five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 2 May 1991]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Police authority	*Declared establishment*	*1986 strength*	*Declared establishment*	*1987 strength*	*Declared establishment*	*1988 strength*	*Declared establishment*	*1989 strength*	*Declared establishment*	*1990 strength*
Dyfed Powys	934	929	935	929	935	927	935	934	943	939
Gwent	978	973	978	977	995	989	1,007	1,000	1,009	1,001
North Wales	1,316	1,268	1,316	1,307	1,326	1,304	1,330	1,332	1,351	1,334
South Wales	3,109	3,099	3,109	3,120	3,109	3,114	3,137	3,118	3,168	3,125

Prison (Marketing of Goods)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes in policy he intends to make to allow men and women serving custodial sentences to produce and market communally items produced within the prison or prison farm; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 25 April 1991]:* We have no plans for any general changes. However, in the recent "Report of the Inquiry into Prison Disturbances 1990" —Cm 1456—it was proposed that there should be schemes to enable a prisoner to contribute to society by making goods for charitable causes. The prison service is currently discussing with representatives of the Koestler Award Trust plans which the trust has to set up a prison charity shops scheme. The trust has been invited to submit a thorough feasibility and cost-benefit analysis of its proposal.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Animal Cruelty (Spain)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Spanish Government concerning cruelty to animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The treatment of animals in another country is a matter for that country, except where provisions are laid down by EC legislation. However, pending confirmation that Spain has implemented the directives on the transport and slaughter of farm animals, the United Kingdom does not license the export of such animals to Spain.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the representations he has received concerning cruelty to animals in Spain.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received 11 letters this year concerning cruelty to animals in Spain. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has received many more representations.

Antarctica

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to propose legislation to give effect to the outcome of the Madrid conference on the future of the Antarctic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We expect the draft environmental protocol to the Antarctic treaty that emerged from Madrid to be concluded at a further meeting in Madrid in June. It would be premature to consider legislation until a final text is available.

DEFENCE

Airfields

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has yet reached a decision on the future of the procurement executive airfields at Bedford, Boscombe Down and Farnborough; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We announced in September 1990 our preliminary view that research and experimental flying should be collocated at Boscombe Down. Since then we have undertaken extensive consultations with a wide range of interested parties, including trades unions, local authorities, the Society of British Aerospace Companies, the Farnborough Airfield Development Corporation, local amenity groups and individuals. We are grateful for all the responses that have been received.

We have now considered carefully the results of these consultations, together with further work that we commissioned from independent consultants. We have concluded that it would be right to confirm the decision to base flying at Boscombe Down, as the most suitable airfield. Detailed planning to implement this decision will now be set in hand. The move to Boscombe Down will take a number of years to complete and there will be further close consultation with interested parties as work proceeds. We also intend to commission an independent environmental impact assessment at Boscombe Down to assist us in planning the move.

The airfields at Bedford and Farnborough will no longer be required for defence purposes and will accordingly become available for disposal. We recognise that decisions on future use could have a major impact on the local areas and stress that we shall want to continue to work closely with the local planning authorities and other interested parties in accordance with normal planning procedures in determining the use to which these sites will be put. Our preliminary assessment is that Bedford could have potential as a commercial, non-passenger, airfield and that options for Farnborough could range from business/commercial aviation, with some associated commercial development of the site, to more extensive development. In considering them, we shall take account of the part the airfield plays in the Government's business aviation policy. No decisions have been made and these options for Bedford and Farnborough will be considered in detailed work now to be set in hand.

Ministry of Defence Police (Headquarters)

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to provide a dedicated headquarters for the Ministry of Defence police.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Ministry of Defence police headquarters and training school, currently located with other Ministry of Defence branches in Empress State building, London and at Medmenham in Buckinghamshire respectively, will move to the site of the former RAF station at Wethersfield in Essex. Planning to this effect is now in progress, and it is expected that these moves will take place during 1992. It is also intended that the operational support unit will move from RAF Wittering to Wethersfield.

As a result of these moves, the Ministry of Defence police will have their own dedicated headquarters, satisfying the recommendation made by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary in 1989. At the same time, the Ministry of Defence police will be provided with improved and up-to-date instructional facilities on a larger and more versatile site which will offer a greater capacity for both recruit and in-force continuation and specialist training.

ENVIRONMENT

Freehold Homes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the increase in the average price of freehold dwelling homes in Yorkshire and Humberside in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. Yeo: The available information does not distinguish between freehold and leasehold sales and includes sales to sitting tenants. The increases in 1989 and 1990 were 28 and 13 per cent. respectively.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, if he will specify in which band the average value of homes is for the illustrative calculation setting a council tax for a band D property occupied by two or more people at a standard level of service; and what the figures quoted in his reply would be if the average value home was *(a)* in band A, *(b)* in band B, *(c)* in band C and *(d)* in band D.

Mr. Key: With the seven bands which we have proposed, a home with the national average value will always be in band D.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will give the council tax for band A, B, D and G properties for a council when the county council spends four per cent. over its standard spending assessment and the district council 32 per cent. but where the majority of properties are in *(a)* band A, *(b)* band B, *(c)* band C and *(d)* band D.

Mr. Key: I have nothing to add to my earlier answer to the hon. Member.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what weighting is given in the standard

spending assessment for people aged over 85 years; and what proportion of people are over 85 years old in *(a)* Grimsby, *(b)* Eastbourne, *(c)* Harrogate and *(d)* Scarborough.

Mr. Key: The number of people aged 85 years and over is used in the calculation of the standard spending assessment for social services for the elderly. A full description of the weight given to this factor is contained in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) as amended by the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England), copies of which are in the Library.

Proportion of the resident population aged 85 years and over

	Per cent.
Grimsby	1·4
Eastbourne	3·6
Harrogate	1·7
Scarborough	2·4

Norfolk County Council

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many measures and directives have been sent from central Government to Norfolk county council which have required Norfolk county council to *(a)* increase its activities and *(b)* employ extra staff; and if he will list each one since 1979.

Mr. Key: The information is not available. Since 1984, however, the Department has closely monitored all central Government initiatives with resource implications for local authorities generally. Estimates of costs are made as accurately and as early as possible and are then taken into account, with all other relevant factors, when the annual local authority finance settlement is made.

Drinking Water (Inspectorate)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *14*, on the workload of the drinking water inspectorate, how the figure of 120 days breaks down into hours per person.

Mr. Trippier: Approximately 53 hours per person on average.

Cryptosporidia

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *14*, if he will publish the report of the outbreak control team into the outbreak of cryptosporidia in Hull in 1990.

Mr. Trippier: The outbreak control team published the report by sending it to the relevant local authorities and district health authorities, to the regional health authority, the Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and the drinking water inspectorate. It is available to the public via the town clerk's office, Hull city council at a cost of approximately £10.

Local Authority Rents

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on rent levels for local authority housing in England.

Mr. Yeo: Information on local authority rents is collected from a number of sources including surveys of authorities by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and claims submitted to the Department for housing revenue account subsidy. Drawing on both sources we estimate current rents as follows:

Region	*April 1991 average local authority rent £ per week*
North	22·60
Yorkshire and Humberside	21·54
East Midlands	23·17
Eastern	27·66
Greater London	35·74
South Eastern	31·36
South West	27·49
West Midlands	26·19
North West	24·50
England	27·29

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by Ordnance Survey in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Baldry: No such fees have been paid during the period in question and the budget for 1991-92 contains no such provision.

Toxic Waste (Wath upon Dearne)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the number of days which have elapsed since toxic waste arrived in Wath upon Dearne near Rotherham.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the waste arrived at Wath on 9 June 1989 and has therefore been present for 700 days.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many visits have been paid to the premises of Wath Recycling by officials of his Department in connection with the toxic waste held at these premises since this material arrived in the summer of 1989.

Mr. Trippier: Three visits have been made by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution inspectors since the summer of 1989 in connection with the consignment of wastes received at that time. Visits have also been made by the Health and Safety Executive which has advised that it will be making a separate representation on this question.

Trade in Wildlife

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that international trade in wildlife does not threaten the survival of species.

Mr. Baldry: This Government have always been active in ensuring that trade in wildlife is controlled so that it does not threaten the survival of any species. Because of

growing concern about the effects of trade on some wildlife populations, we have asked our scientific advisers—the royal botanic gardens at Kew and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee—to undertake a wide-ranging study. They will review the evidence as to whether the trade in wild-taken plants and animals is compatible with maintaining species at satisfactory levels. Following this review, they will make recommendations to be taken into account when considering proposals to change current controls under the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora—CITES.

The United Kingdom was one of the founder members of CITES, which is based on the principle that wildlife should be used only at levels which can be sustained. We have always been in the forefront of promoting and supporting necessary changes to the convention and complementary measures in this country and the European Community. The study—which is to be completed by the end of July—will make a significant contribution to the conservation of wildlife by ensuring that Government action continues to be based on a sound scientific foundation.

Global Warming

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has commissioned or published in the last five years on the potential effects of global warming on London.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 8 May 1991]*: The report of the Department's climate change impacts review group, published in January of this year, considers a wide range of possible impacts, some of which are relevant to London. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the revenue cost assumed for 1991-92 in respect of individuals' capital gains tax allowance.

Mr. Maude: The total revenue cost of the capital gains tax annual exempt amount for individuals and trusts is estimated to be about £350 million at 1991-92 levels. This estimate does not allow for the effect on yield of the behavioural changes which would occur if the annual exempt amount were removed.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the capital gains tax yield for the latest available year if all equity transactions where a gain was taken within 12 months were taxed at 40 per cent;

(2) what amount of capital gains tax was paid reflecting holdings of less than one year in *(a)* 1988-89, *(b)* 1989-90 and *(c)* 1990-91.

Mr. Maude: Information is available about the distribution, by length of period of ownership of assets, for net chargeable gains realised in 1987-88. A detailed analysis is provided in table 11.7 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1990". This analysis suggests that about 5 per cent. of net chargeable gains for 1987-88 were attributable to assets owned for less than one year. The figures exclude gains realised by companies which are chargeable to corporation tax.

If capital gains tax on equities were restricted to disposals of equities within one year of acquisition with gains on equities held for more than one year exempted from tax, it is likely that, after taking account of behavioural effects, the total capital gains tax yeild from equities would be small.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the revenue cost for 1990-91 of the capital gains tax indexation provisions.

Mr. Maude: I regret that it is not possible to provide a sufficiently reliable estimate of the cost of indexation relief.

Public Employees

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will give details of the number of persons employed in the United Kingdom in *(a)* the civil service, *(b)* local government, *(c)* the national health service, *(d)* the armed forces and *(e)* public corporations, for each of the years 1961, 1979, 1985 and 1990;

(2) how many persons were employed in the entire public sector in the United Kingdom *(a)* in 1961 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; and what percentage increase this represents.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested can be found in appendix 1, table 2 of the article on "Employment in the public and private sectors" which appeared in the December 1990 edition of the Central Statistical Office's "Economic Trends" publication. A copy is available in the Library. The percentage increase in the number of persons employed in the public sector in the United Kingdom over the period 1961 to 1990 was 3 per cent.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update, to take account of the 1991 Budget, the information on tax changes contained in the answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), of 21 October 1986, *Official Report*, columns *812-14*.

Mr. Maude: Latest estimates of the annual change in income tax liability resulting from the changes in tax rates, allowance, and thresholds are in the table. The 1978-79 income tax regime has been indexed to 1991-92 levels by reference to the statutory formula, and allowing for independent taxation.

For the purposes of these calculations the indexed regime of 1978-79 has been applied directly to the income base of 1991-92. In practice, retention of the 1978-79 regime, indexed as appropriate, for the intervening years would have led to changes in the income base.

Reductions in income tax in 1991-92 compared with 1978-79 indexed regime

Range of individual's income in 1991-92, £	*Number of individuals liable under the indexed regime in 1991-92 (million)*	*Total reduction in tax compared with indexed regime, £ million*	*Average reduction per individual at 1991-92 income levels, £ per annum*
Under 5,000	3·7	480	130
5,000-10,000	8·4	2,900	350
10,000-15,000	7·1	4,600	650
15,000-20,000	4·1	3,800	950
20,000-30,000	2·9	4,200	1,400
30,000-50,000	1·2	3,300	2,800
Over 50,000	0·4	9,500	21,900
Total	27·8	28,700	1,000

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to 1991-92 the information on real net earnings provided in the answer to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 10 April 1986, *Official Report*, columns *193-94*.

Mr. Maude: The information is given in the tables.

Income Tax and Income Tax and NIC[1] as percentages of gross earnings

	Multiples of average earnings[2]				
	2/3	*1*	*2*	*5*	*10*
Single people					
1956-57					
Tax	10·4	16·6	24·8	40·5	55·2
Tax and NIC	14·0	18·9	26·0	41·0	55·4
1978-79					
Tax	21·0	25·0	29·5	50·5	66·6
Tax and NIC	27·5	31·5	33·7	52·2	67·5
1991-92[3]					
Tax	17·9	20·3	26·0	34·4	37·2
Tax and NIC	25·3	28·2	30·7	36·3	38·1
Married men					
1956-57					
Tax	5·1	11·2	22·0	38·9	54·2
Tax and NIC	8·6	13·5	23·1	39·4	54·4
1978-79					
Tax	15·4	21·3	27·2	48·8	65·7
Tax and NIC	21·9	27·8	31·4	50·5	66·5
1991-92[3]					
Tax	14·2	17·8	24·0	33·6	36·8
Tax and NIC	21·5	25·7	28·7	35·5	37·7

Changes in real net earnings after Income Tax and NIC (1956-57 = 100)

	Multiples of average earnings				
	2/3	*1*	*2*	*5*	*10*
Single people					
1978-79	124·9	125·3	132·8	120·1	108·3
1991-92[3]	176·1	179·5	189·8	218·8	281·4
Married men					
1978-79	126·8	123·9	132·4	121·1	109·0
1991-92[3]	174·1	174·2	188·1	215·7	277·0

[1] At the contracted-in rate
[2] Full time adult males (all occupations)
[3] Provisional

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage change in the United Kingdom gross domestic product for the last financial year.

Mr. Maples: Preliminary estimates of the gross domestic product at constant factor cost for the first quarter of 1991 and the 1990-91 financial year will be published by Central Statistical Office on 22 May 1991. Estimates at current market prices will be available on 24 June.

Mortgages

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the size of mortgage interest payable in respect of domestic property in the northern region in 1985 and each subsequent year and the stock of mortgages and the average size of mortgage interest payable in the northern region for each year since 1985.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 8 May 1991]:* Readily available estimates, based on regional information from family expenditure surveys, are as follows:

Mortgages in the Northern Region

	Gross interest payable (£ million)	*Number of mortgages (thousands)*	*Average amount of gross interest (£)*
1986	690	440	1,550
1987	720	420	1,800
1988	940	510	1,850
1989	1,280	530	2,400
[1]1990	1,630	560	2,900

[1] Provisional.

Pensions

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action has been taken in the last six months with regard to the indexation of public sector pensions; what plans he has for determining future increases in public sector pensions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* Public service pensions are uprated annually in April in line with the movement in the retail prices index in the 12 months to the previous September. Accordingly, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on 24 October 1990, at column *348*, public service pensions as well as state retirement pensions and other benefits were increased by 10·9 per cent. from 8 April 1991. There are no plans to change the current indexation arrangements by which public service pensions are increased.

Council Finances (Swaps)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the United Kingdom banking industry of the House of Lords decision in the case of the district auditor *v.* Hammersmith and Fulham council involving swaps.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The Government are conscious of the strength of feeling about this issue among the banking community. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have discussed it at length with the president of the British Bankers Association on two occasions, and the Governor of the Bank of England has kept us informed of City opinion. Officials have had long and detailed discussions with the BBA. We have been particularly anxious that all possible options for mitigating the consequences of the judgment should be fully explored.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 7 May, at columns *402-3*, after careful consideration, the Government have concluded that it is best not to seek to alter the existing obligations of the parties.

This problem is specific to local authority swaps and has no implications for the vast majority of financial transactions or for local authority borrowing.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he proposes to take action to end the uncertainty caused to local authorities and the banking industry by the House of Lords decision in the case of the district auditors *v.* Hammersmith and Fulham council involving swaps.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 7 May, at columns *402-3*.

WALES

Play Areas (Safety Measures)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, on safety measures in children's play areas, if he intends to provide additional funding for local authorities to put into practice the advice being drawn up on play area safety.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In framing local authority revenue settlements for 1992-93 and subsequent years, allowance will be made for any new burdens imposed on local authorities by central Government.

Roads and Pavements (Maintenance)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates his Department has of the expenditure on the repair and maintenance of roads and pavements under the responsibility of county and district councils in Wales in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information available is given in the table. Prior to 1989-90 figures are available on a consistent basis only for the broad category shown.

Current Expenditure[1]

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[2]
District council expenditure[3]	2·9	2·9	4·1	4·0
of which expenditure on structural maintenance of roads and other highways maintenance[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	1·6
County council expenditure[3]	94·0	105·9	111·1	119·8
of which expenditure on structural maintenance of roads and other highways maintenance[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	92·6

[1] Net of local income, but gross of relevant specific Government grants.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Includes all highways and bridge maintenance, street cleaning for highways purposes, lighting and associated professional and technical services. Includes net expenditure incurred on behalf of other local authorities under agency agreements.
[4] Excludes net expenditure incurred on behalf of other local authorities under agency agreements.

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he offers to general practitioners who wish to refer their patients direct to the treatment centre for cataract surgery funded by his Department at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor, on whether consultant surgeons at Bangor will accept patient referrals in circumstances other than where the patient's area health authority consultant refuses to co-operate.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: General practitioners should contact the treatment centre which will discuss with the patients' consultant whether re-referral will be in the clinical interests of the patient.

ENERGY

Renewable Energy

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list his Department's current and planned renewable energy programmes in Wales by type, cost, site, location and capacity;

(2) how many applications for renewable energy projects have been submitted for Wales up to date; and if he will list them by site, district council, type and capacity.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department supports an extensive programme of research, development and demonstration of sources of renewable energy where those sources show the potential for economic viability and are environmentally acceptable. In 1990-91 total expenditure

was over £20 million. Expenditure is distributed throughout the United Kingdom. There is no specific allocation for Wales. However, there are currently 17 renewable energy projects which have a contractor or site located in Wales. They comprise:

Technology	*Projects*	*Contract value £ million*
Wind	7	4·9
Solar	4	0·6
Tidal	6	1·9

Wind
Construction of Carmarthen bay 25m vertical axis wind turbine;
Performance monitoring of 25m vertical axis wind turbine;
Design, construction and demonstration of MS3 wind turbine;
Design, construct and test a demonstration vertical axis wind turbine 850;
Monitoring of the WEG MS-3 horizontal axis wind turbine at Carmarthen Bay;
Experimental work 25m St. Regis vertical axis wind turbine;
Anemometry masts for Capel Cynon;

Solar
Field trials team 2;
Air flow modelling of the Gateway 2 atrium building;
Simulation studies of domestic heating systems;
Evaluation of multi media database solar building design;

Tidal
Severn barrage development project;
Conwy barrage feasibility study;
Waders wildfowl distribution in the Severn estuary;
Severn barrage report consultation;
Further environment and energy capture work on Severn barrage ;
Conwy barrage engineering optimisation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

High Definition Television

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state Her Majesty's Government's position on current discussions within the European Community to develop standards for high definition television, D2 MAC and HD-MAC

Mr. Leigh: The Government welcome the consultations initiated by the European Commission with a view to securing consensus between broadcasters and manufacturers on the best route to high definition television. The Government will take a position when the Commission makes its proposals known. The Government have made known their views that the MAC family of standards should be given a fair chance to succeed in the market for wide screen TV transmissions by satellite but this should not entail the enforced cut-off of existing transmission standards.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Leigh: The readily available information about the public appointments for which my right hon. Friend is responsible is given in the current edition of "Public Bodies" and in "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library. A number of these appointments are expected to be made in 1991 and 1992.

Spirits (Measures)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the representations he received regarding the proposals to permit one further round metric quantity of 35ml and of extending the requirement to use prescribed measures to cover other spirits as announced in the answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) of 3 May 1990, *Official Report*, column *612;* and when he expects to lay orders on these matters.

Mr. Leigh: I am considering the replies to my Department's consultation paper. No decision has yet been made on whether to implement the proposals nor on when any order on these matters would be laid.

Eurocopy Group

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *119*, when he expects to announce the outcome of the Director General of Fair Trading's investigation into malpractice by companies in the Eurocopy Group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the responsibility for investigations under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 is the responsibility of the Director General of Fair Trading. I have asked him to inform the hon. Gentleman of the report of the investigation in question when it becomes available.

My statement to the House on 18 March in reply to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), at columns 23-24 reflects the Government's general position on this issue.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will draw up a code of practice for photocopying companies to prevent the malpractices now under investigation by the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Redwood: As I said in my reply to the hon. Member on 18 March, at columns 23-24, the code of practice of the Equipment Leasing Association already requires members to "behave with integrity" and not to

"misrepresent facts to a lessee concerning any aspect of a leasing transaction".

This is the standard that the Government would expect of the industry and the only way for the industry to retain the confidence of its customers.

I understand that the Equipment Leasing Association is currently in the process of reviewing the provisions of their code to take into account commercial developments since it was originally published.

In addition to this code of practice, both the CBI and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce have written to their members emphasising the need to consider carefully photocopier leasing agreements and the possibility of malpractices by some operators.

Inner-city Task Forces

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to make any changes to the location of the inner-city task forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Inner-city task forces have always been part of a rolling programme, tackling difficult areas and then moving on. I have decided to establish three new task forces: one in Hackney, one in Hull and one in South Tyneside. These task forces will work closely with the business community, the training and enterprise council and with the local authority to improve the job and training opportunities for those in the area. They will all be starting their work by the end of the year. The three new task forces, like the existing ones, are not intended to be permanent. One of their aims is to foster the development of local organisations which can capitalise on the task forces' work when the task forces themselves leave.

The task forces in Leeds, Hartlepool and Spitalfields have now made significant progress in meeting these objectives, and I have consequently decided that they should close in the autumn. In the meantime, they will continue to build up the capacity of local bodies to take over their work in the future, and they will continue to welcome new proposals until the end of June 1991. Funding will also continue to be provided for a limited number of projects after the closure of the task forces.

Task forces have proved highly successful in creating jobs, encouraging training opportunities and stimulating enterprise in the country's most deprived areas. Since they began, task forces have committed some £73 million to over 2,700 projects to help the people of inner city communities. A recent independent evaluation of the task force initiative by PA Cambridge Economic Consultants concluded that task forces are successfully and cost-effectively meeting their objectives and helping to achieve the Government's aim of regenerating the inner cities. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

Companies House

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets have been set for the Companies House executive agency.

Mr. Redwood: In making available information about companies, Companies House promotes enterprise and contributes substantially to open and informed markets. Executive agency status has produced very significant improvements in efficiency and the standard of service provided to Companies House customers. Details of performance against the agency's original two-year targets will be available when the Companies House annual report is published.

The chief executive of Companies House has been set the following quality of service and financial performance targets:

i. To make all documents available to searchers within a maximum of five working days of receipt;
ii. To increase the compliance rate for annual returns and accounts to 85 per cent. by June 1992, and 90 per cent. by June 1994;
iii. To provide a two-hour search service for all customers from April 1991, and to provide a one-hour search service to all customers by April 1994;
iv. To reduce real unit costs by 1 per cent. in 1991-92.

The achievement of these stretching targets would represent a further significant improvement in the quality of Companies House services, as well as building on the agency's improved financial performance. For example, a target of processing documents within a maximum of five working days compares with an average performance of 25 working days in 1988-89, and the original target to ensure that by April 1991 documents were processed within an average of 18 working days.

Additional financial performance targets will be set when Companies House achieves trading fund status.

EC Regional Funds

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what additional funding would be provided for the Rotherham area in each of the next three years if it were to receive its share of the total sum available from EC funds under the Community's regional support arrangements; and what is his estimate of the funds which this area will receive in each of the next three years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* Decisions on the future level of funding for the United Kingdom's objective 2 regions will be made by the Commission shortly. For the Community's RECHAR initiative the Commission has already announced the level of funding for Great Britain.

It is not, however, possible to estimate what funding any particular area will receive since project selection is a matter for programme co-ordinating committees to consider.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is now taking to ensure that areas affected by contraction of the mining industry receive the benefit of the funds which are available from the EC.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The United Kingdom Government submitted their applications under the RECHAR programme for coalmining areas on 26 July 1990. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry, for Northern Ireland, for Wales and for Scotland, and other Ministers met Mr. Bruce Millan, EC Commissioner for regional policy, on 25 April when, among other EC structural fund issues, the Commission's approval of these programmes was discussed. Discussions are continuing at official level to resolve any outstanding questions so that early approval to these programmes may be given.

Training (Bradford)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to enable Bradford Task Force to support training provided by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and other training centres facing closure, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* All applications to Bradford task force for assistance for training projects are considered on their merits. The task force will continue to support schemes, in partnership with other funding organisations, which help local task force area residents obtain the skills needed to obtain employment.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will direct Bradford task force to

provide training places for those with special needs to replace those which will no longer be offered by the Bradford TEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The Bradford task force already supports a range of training initiatives aimed at disadvantaged, unemployed task force area residents. Many of these are being carried out in partnership with the Bradford and district training and enterprise council.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will update the table given in his answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report*, 25 July 1990, columns *280-84*, giving the latest available information in respect of each city technology college or proposed and planned city technology college.

Mr. Eggar: The table covers announced CTCs:

	Kingshurst	*Tyneside*	*Bradford*	*Leigh*	*Britschool*	*Djanogly*	*Macmillan College*
Site	Kingshurst School site	St. John Fisher School site	Newby Square, Bradford	Downs School site	Site of Selhurst Tertiary Centre	Sherwood Rise, Nottingham	St. Michael RC School, Middlesbrough
LEA	Solihull	Gateshead	Bradford	Kent	Croydon	Nottingham-shire	Cleveland
Opening dates	1988	1990	1990	1990	1991	1989	1989
Planned number of pupils	1,100	900	980	1,250	720	990	1,100
Total capital cost[1]	£9·71m	£8·609m	£9·162m	£8·95m	£7·001m	£9·71m	£8·450m
Exchequer contribution	£7·598m	£6·887m	£7·330m	£7·16m	£4·201m	£8·191m	£6·744m
Sponsors' contribution							
i) committed[2]	£2·112m	£1·722m	£1·832m	£1·79m	£2·800m	£1·519m	£1·706m
ii) confirmed	£2·787m	£1·600m	£2·864m	£1·519m	£2·213m	£1·887m	£1·509m
Principal Sponsors	Hanson Trust	Peter Vardy	Dixons plc, Mr. Hakim Wong	Mr. G. Leigh	The British Record Industry Trust	Mr. Harry Djanogly	BAT Industries
Contracts awarded to sponsors	None	Building contract—Laings Northern	None	None	None	None	None
School closure involved	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Has a ballot of parents been held and with what result	No	No	No	[3]No	No	No	No

	Harris	*Bacon's*	*Haberdashers'*	*Corby*	*Derby*	*Telford*	*Wandsworth*	*Bristol*
Site	Sylvan school site, Croydon	Bacon's school site, Southwark	Haberdashers' Aske's, Hatcham, school site	Great Oakley, Corby	Wood Street, Derby	New build	Mayfield School	Kingswood Borough Council
LEA	Croydon	Southwark	Lewisham	Northants	Derbyshire	Shropshire	Wandsworth	Avon
Opening dates	1990	1991	1991	1991	1992	1991	1991	1992
Planned number of pupils	1,100	1,100	1,100	900	900	1,000	1,000	900
Total capital cost[1]	£8·662m	£14·279m	£8·945m	£9·95m	£10·200m	£10·751m	£11·116m	To be determined
Exchequer contribution	£6·93m	£11·423m	£5·500m	£7·96m	£8·160m	£8·399m	£8·893m	Not more than 80 per cent. of cost
Sponsors' contribution								
i) committed[2]	£1·732m	£2·856m	£3·445m	£1·99m	£2·040m	£2·352m	£2·223m	At least 20 per cent. of cost
ii) confirmed	£1·708m	[4]£2·500m	[5]£4·445m	£1·99m	£2·000m	£2·352m	£2·223m	At least 20 per cent of cost
Principal Sponsors	Philip and Pauline Harris Charitable Trust	Philip and Pauline Harris Charitable Trust/ Southwark Diocesan Board of Education	Haberdashers' Company as Trustees of Robert Aske Charity	Mr. Hugh de Capell Brooke	The Landau Foundation	The Mercers Tarmac plc	ADT plc	Wolfson Foundation and Cable and Wireless
Contracts awarded to sponsors	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None

	Harris	Bacon's	Haberdashers'	Corby	Derby	Telford	Wandsworth	Bristol
School closure involved	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Has a ballot of parents been held and with what result	Yes majority against	No	Yes majority in favour	No	[6]No	[6]No	[6]No	[6]No

Notes:

[1] In addition, the Exchequer bears revenue costs on a basis comparable to those of maintained schools in similar areas.

[2] Sponsors' contributions based on their agreed percentage.

[3] Public consultations were held by Kent on its proposals to close the Downs school. One statutory objection containing 62 signatures was made to the section 12 proposal subsequently published.

[4] Existing school to be relocated to new site, the sale proceeds of the present site which have been valued at £1·5m will form a sponsorship contribution from the Southwark Diocesan Board.

[5] This figure includes the donation of the present site, which has been valued at £3·445m.

[6] In each case, LEA, local schools and other interests consulted on proposal to establish CTC.

Cambridge Regional College

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to provide a guarantee that the debt charges on capital expenditure to provide new accommodation for Cambridge regional college will not remain the responsibility of the local education authority should the college be accorded corporate status.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[pursuant to the reply, 22 April 1991, c. 322]:* From April 1993 the council that will be established to fund the new sector will take responsibility for meeting the cost of servicing debts arising from contracts for new capital spending in sixth form colleges and LEA-maintained colleges of further and higher education. The council will take responsibility only for the costs of debts relating to contracts entered into after 1 April 1991 which have a value in excess of £50,000 and to which I have consented under the arrangements I announced on 21 March this year.

The maximum amount of each local education authority's debt for which the council will take responsibility will not exceed the level allowed within the authority's annual capital guidelines for relevant institutions in 1991-92 and 1992-93. These arrangements will be reflected in an appropriate adjustment to revenue support grant for future local authority finance settlements.

The servicing of debt arising from contracts entered into before 1 April 1991 will remain the responsibility of local education authorities. It will continue to be supported through annual local authority finance settlements as now.

Given this assurance, I expect authorities to wish to continue with their existing capital programmes and to undertake further appropriate capital spending on the colleges.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Overseas Aid

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister whether his statement concerning the growing aid programme, *Official Report*, column 163, 30 April 1991, referred to the aid level in real or nominal terms; and if he will provide the figures on which the claim was based.

The Prime Minister: Over the three-year public expenditure survey period to 1993-94 the aid programme is planned to increase to £1,860 million. Compared with the original planning figure for 1990-91 this represents continued real-terms growth.

HEALTH

Acute Hospital Beds

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the number of patients treated in acute hospital beds for each year since 1979; and what proportion were over pensionable age.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

Estimated number of cases[1] treated, acute sector[2] NHS hospitals, England 1979 to 1988-89

(Thousands)

	Total (all ages)	Over 65	Percentage age over 65
1979	4,750·2	1,137·3	23·9
1980	5,024·9	1,222·8	24·3
1981	5,153·5	1,280·9	24·9
1982	5,090·0	1,315·9	25·8
1983	5,443·7	1,387·5	25·5
1984	5,633·6	1,426·4	25·5
1985	5,802·9	1,511·9	26·0
1986	5,922·0	[3]—	[3]—
1987-88	5,921·0	1,513·0	25·6
1988-89	6,006·0	1,590·8	26·5

Note: The figures are estimates derived from the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE)—calendar years 1979-85—and the Hospital Episode System (HES) (from financial year 1987-88).

[1] Ordinary admissions and day cases.

[2] 1979-86—Discharges and deaths from all specialties other than those relating to maternity, mental health, geriatics, units for the younger disabled and healthy liveborn infants.

1987-88 and 1988-89—As above but excluding pathology.

[3] It is not possible to estimate a number for patients over 65 for 1986 because HIPE ceased in 1985 and HES did not start until 1987-88.

Traffic Casualties

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, further to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *497*, he has now found a suitable legislative vehicle for annulling section 155 of the Road Traffic Act 1972.

Mr. Dorrell: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on 12 March at column *497*.

NHS Charges

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of persons eligible for exemption from national health service charges by virtue of the low-income scheme actually claimed that exemption in the three most recent years for which figures are available;

(2) what percentage of people eligible to claim under the national health service low-income scheme made a claim in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Figures are not available for the potential number of people who may have benefited from the NHS low income scheme had they made a claim for remission of charges. Between May 1988, when revised methods of collecting statistical information were introduced, and March 1989, a total of 972,637 claims were received and a total of 689,945 awards of either full or partial remission of charges were made. For the financial year 1989-90 the corresponding figures were 900,509 and 813,671 and for 1990-91 1,017,739 and 957,886. Claimants may make more than one claim in any 12-month period.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the gross annual cost of administering the low-income scheme for health benefits and the cost per claim in the three most recent years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The NHS low income scheme is administered by the Department of Social Security on behalf of the Department of Health, on a repayment basis. Figures are available only for the two years 1989-90 and 1990-91 when the repayments were £8·107 million and £7·180 million respectively.

The average cost per claim was £6·76 in 1989-90 and £7·65 in 1990-91. No figures are available for earlier years.

Hip Fractures

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the rate of incidence of hip fractures in *(a)* the total population, *(b)* the male population, *(c)* the female population and *(d)* the female population over 75 years in each year since 1980.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* The information is given in the table.

Estimated Numbers of Discharges and Deaths (1980-1985) and Finished Consultant Episodes (1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 where principal diagnosis was ICD 820: Fracture of Neck of Femur and Incidence per 10,000 Population NHS Hospitals, England

	Total	*Male*	*Females*	
	All Ages	*All Ages*	*All Ages*	*Over 75*
1980	39,261	8,750	30,511	21,874
incidence per 10,000 population	8	4	13	120
1981	39,574	8,904	30,670	22,409
incidence per 10,000 population	8	4	13	120
1982	40,829	8,994	31,835	23,095
incidence per 10,000 population	9	4	13	121
1983	42,189	9,157	33,032	24,227
incidence per 10,000 population	9	4	14	124
1984	41,991	8,450	33,541	25,256
incidence per 10,000 population	9	4	14	127
1985	44,403	9,700	34,703	26,272
incidence per 10,000 population	9	4	14	129
1987-88	41,763	9,055	32,707	25,049
incidence per 10,000 population	9	4	13	119
1988-89	42,048	8,677	33,371	25,722
incidence per 10,000 population	9	4	14	120
1989-90	48,925	10,303	38,622	30,295
incidence per 10,000 population	10	4	16	139

The figures for 1987-88 onwards are extracted from the Hospital Episode Statistics. They are provisional estimates based on incomplete data and may be subject to revision when ongoing analysis has been completed. Data for 1986 is not available.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

World Bank Forest Policy

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is supporting to ensure more local participation in preparation, appraisal and implementation of World bank forest projects.

Mrs. Chalker: It is already World bank practice to consult widely on all of their projects, including those in the forestry sector. The bank welcomes and encourages discussion with local interest groups and non-governmental organisations on aspects of project preparation, appraisal and implementation. As part of its wider forest policy review the bank is looking again at its practice. The British Government support these efforts to strengthen local participation.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to press for a World bank forest policy that clearly states that the bank will no longer lend to projects which degrade or destroy tropical forests.

Mrs. Chalker: A major objective of the world bank's new forest policy will be to help ensure that tropical forests are managed on a sustainable basis. The British Government fully support that principle and has so informed bank management.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the timetable for approval and adoption of the revised World bank forest policy; and what assessment he has undertaken of whether the new policy will affect proposed World bank loans already under consideration.

Mrs. Chalker: World bank executive directors, management and staff are scheduled to discuss forest policy in a seminar on 31 May. Depending on the outcome of this discussion, the present intention is for management to seek formal board approval of the new policy by the end of June. No forestry sector loans currently under consideration will come to the board before the policy is finalised.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many proposed World bank loans that include plans for use of forested land, reafforestation, or the timber industry, are currently in the process of being approved.

Mrs. Chalker: None.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evaluation he has made of the implementation by the International Tropical Timber Organisation of its guidelines on sustainable management of tropical forests; and what recommendation Her Majesty's Government are making on how the World bank could implement the International Tropical Timber Organisation's guidelines.

Mrs. Chalker: Progress with implementation of ITTO guidelines on sustainable management of tropical forests will be discussed at the ITTO council meeting in Quito from 27 May to 6 June. The ITTO is organising a conference of foresters in Yokohama in July to promote further the guidelines. The ODA has made it clear to the authors of the World bank's forest policy that the bank should incorporate the guidelines into its overall strategy.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom's executive director at the World bank will be putting forward the concerns expressed by United Kingdom non-governmental organisations to Her Majesty's Government concerning World bank forest policy.

Mrs. Chalker: In discussing the new forest policy with World bank officials, the United Kingdom executive director and his staff have drawn extensively on material and comments prepared by British non-governmental organisations. International and developing country NGOs had an opportunity to discuss the new policy directly with bank staff on 23 and 24 April in Washington.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what way existing Overseas Development Agency policy on support for forestry differs from the draft World bank forest policy currently under discussion.

Mrs. Chalker: The World bank draft policy paper has been revised four times since early March. Work on this will not be complete until the summer. Until it is, the Government are in no position to say how, if at all, respective policies will differ.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the recruitment, by the World bank, of a substantial number of staff with experience of community participation in forestry, and support substantial training programmes for other World bank operational staff in practical implementation of forestry policy.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom executive director has already stressed the need for the World bank to develop an appropriate range of skills to support implementation of the new forest policy. The bank must decide on the mix of new recruitment and internal training required to fulfil this obligation.

Brazil

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in establishing a comprehensive pilot project for forest conservation in Brazil, as proposed at the Group of Seven Houston summit in July 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government of Brazil have been preparing a project proposal in cooperation with the World bank and the European Community. Draft proposals are being discussed at a further meeting of the three parties in Brazil on 9 and 10 May.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Minister for Overseas Development, during her recent visit to Brazil, discussed Brazilian law No. 7.827 of 9 September 1990 creating the constitutional fund for financing the north, and the reactivation, on 17 December 1990, of the fund for investment in the Amazon with the Brazilian Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I discussed with Brazilian Ministers reports about the reactivation of schemes which earlier resulted in ranching and unnecessary deforestation in northern Brazil. I was assured that, although schemes to promote sustainable development in Amazonia were being reactivated, detailed arrangements had still to be worked out and care would be taken to ensure that the incentives would not result in needless deforestation or unsustainable logging.

Forestry

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place a statement of the Overseas Development Agency's forestry policy in the Library.

Mrs. Chalker: The Overseas Development Agency's forestry policy is set out in the memorandum and evidence given to the Environment Committee's inquiry into the climatological and environmental effects of rain forest destruction last year. Also in the Library are copies of the Overseas Development Agency's booklet "Environment and the British Aid Programme" and the Government's White Paper "This Common Inheritance", both of which have sections on tropical forests.

Departmental Budget

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the size of the ODA's contingency reserve, the disaster relief budget and the food aid budget for financial year 1991-92; whether any changes have been made to each of those since the start of the financial year; and how much of each has so far been allocated and for what purpose.

Mrs. Chalker: For 1991-92 the contingency reserve was initially set at £70 million. Allocations totalling

£22·727 million have been made—£19·5 million for Iraqi refugee relief, £3·0 million towards Bangladesh cyclone relief, £0·227 million in respect of other emergencies.

Parliamentary approval for expenditure arising from these dispositions will be sought as appropriate through the estimates.

Within the contingency reserve £10 million was set aside initially for disaster relief. Of this £9 million was provided for in subhead A3(7) of the supply estimates, of which £2,827,000 has been spent, as follows:

	£
Iraqi refugees (Kurdish crisis)	2,600,000
UNDRO: Afghanistan earthquake	7,000
World Vision: Malawi floods	46,000
SCF: Malawi floods	114,000
SCF: Uganda displaced persons	60,000

Assistance for the Bangladesh cyclone and further assistance for the Iraqi refugees will be charged to this subhead, supplemented as necessary by transfers from the unallocated section.

The remaining £1 million was provided for in subhead B3(9) and has yet to be spent.

Provision for food aid in 1991-92, under subheads A3(8) and B3(8) in the supply estimates, totals £19·5 million. Allocations are made in terms of tonnes of cereals, as this is the basis of the United Kingdom's obligation under the food aid convention. The following allocations have been made:

Subhead A3(8) Bilateral Food Aid

Country	*Quantity tonnes*
Ethiopia	25,000
Mozambique	10,000
Sudan	25,000
Total	60,000
Subhead B3(8) Multilateral Food Aid	
Angola (fulfilment of 1990-91 pledge to special UN programme which has been delayed due to local difficulties)	2,200
World food programme regular programme	25,000
Protracted refugee operations:	
Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia	5,000
Mozambican refugees in Malawi	5,000
International emergency food reserve	10,000
Total	47,200
Plus cash contribution to WFP administrative expenses	£500,000

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish tables showing *(a)* the expenditure per capita of population of each local authority in Scotland and *(b)* the level of central Government support per capita of population to each local authority.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information, based on local authorities' budget estimates and the aggregate external finance settlement for 1991-92, is set out in the table.

	1 1991-92 budget estimates per capita £	*2 1991-92 government support per capita* £
Borders	959	777
Central	866	671
Dumfries and Galloway	941	762
Fife	921	699
Grampian	842	688
Highland	1,112	912
Lothian	922	645
Strathclyde	914	733
Tayside	911	716
Orkney	1,368	1,266
Shetland	2,540	2,468
Western Isles	1,825	1,731
Berwickshire	108	79
Ettrick and Lauderdale	118	82
Roxburgh	130	89
Tweedale	112	82
Clackmannan	179	109
Falkirk	124	93
Stirling	191	120
Annandale and Eskdale	122	70
Nithsdale	111	75
Stewartry	115	69
Wigtown	125	84
Dunfermline	141	89
Kirkcaldy	131	84
North East Fife	153	94
Aberdeen	197	124
Banff and Buchan	129	85
Gordon	128	81
Kincardine and Deeside	99	76
Moray	117	85
Badenoch and Strathspey	123	86
Caithness	121	88
Inverness	105	81
Lochaber	149	116
Nairn	117	78
Ross and Cromarty	164	119
Skye and Lochalsh	167	145
Sutherland	154	113
East Lothian	162	105
Edinburgh	219	137
Midlothian	167	89
West Lothian	130	90
Argyll and Bute	211	154
Bearsden and Milngavie	144	86
Clydebank	237	146
Clydesdale	172	97
Cumbernauld	131	83
Cumnock and Doon Valley	153	98
Cunninghame	167	106
Dumbarton	168	93
East Kilbride	149	68
Eastwood	109	71
Glasgow	265	195
Hamilton	154	98
Inverclyde	180	115
Kilmarnock and Loudon	142	89
Kyle and Carrick	161	94
Monklands	193	123
Motherwell	165	109
Renfrew	173	110
Strathkelvin	161	98
Angus	125	85
Dundee	200	136
Perth and Kinross	140	95

Notes:

1. Figures used in column 1 are total relevant current expenditure including loan and leasing charges.
2. Total Government support includes revenue support grant, estimated non-domestic rate income and estimated specific

grants for each authority. An additional £7·2 million specific grant relating to urban programm expenditure has not been allocated to individual authorities.

3. The figures in both columns were calculated using the population figures at June 1989.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the cost incurred in debt write-off for the electricity generating and distribution companies prior to privatisation; and what percentage of the total debt this is.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In reconstructing the companies' balance sheets prior to flotation, outstanding NLF loans amounting to £1·044 billion were extinguished in Scottish Hydro-Electric plc and ScottishPower plc. Subsequently the Government injected new long-term debt totalling £516 million into the companies, together with a short-term debenture of £110 million. At the same time, all outstanding tax losses available to the companies were removed.

The difference between loans written off and debentures issued is £418 million. This represents 40 per cent. of the total amount of NLF loans extinguished. The Government expect that this sum will be more than offset by the proceeds of sale of the two companies, which will reflect their new capital structure.

Social Services

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total number of voluntary sector social work staff in Scotland who received financial support to undertake the certificate in social services course in each of the past five years; what was the total level of support allocated in each of the past five years; and what is the projected level of support and numbers to be involved in the current financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of staff receiving financial support for certificate in social services courses and the levels of support for the past five years and the current financial year are set out in the table.

Number of staff receiving financial support

	Number	*Total support (£)*
1986-87	62	226,123
1987-88	55	184,965
1988-89	65	310,281
1989-90	52	203,900
1990-91	28	101,244
1991-92	18	[1]119,053

[1] Estimated.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of those voluntary organisations which have received support for the professional training of its social workers in each of the past five years; what was the total level of financial support in each organisation over the same period; and if he will make a statement on future increases in support for professional social work training in the voluntary sector.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The names of voluntary organisations receiving support for professional training of its social workers and the levels of that support over the past five years are set out in the table.

It is not Government policy fully to fund the training needs of the voluntary sector and agencies are encouraged to include realistic training costs in budgets to ensure their acceptance into mainstream funding. The current level of support for 1991-92 to the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work is £1,003,000 the majority of which is devoted to supporting voluntary sector training interests. The level of future support for professional social work training will be considered by the Scottish Office alongside other demands on resources.

Voluntary organisations receiving support for professional training of social workers

Name of voluntary organisation	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
	£	£	£	£	£
SACRO	2,692				
Aberlour Child Care Trust	8,681	11,487	22,471	4,972	8,250
Cornerstone Society for the Mentally Handicapped	2,671	2,108	2,634	3,836	
Dundee and District Spastics Association	1,405				
Ark Housing Association	9,541	9,451	14,529	8,610	485
L'Arche	898				
Dundee Cyrenians	2,183	3,421	1,000		
Good Shepherd Centre	8,765		21,166	4,232	
Castlemilk Family Centre	4,186				
Balmyre House	4,398	2,748			3,220
Dean Orphanage and Cauvins Trust	1,942				2,750
Skye and Lochalsh Association for Disability	1,567	3,696	2,885		
Whitehill House Association	2,518		2,516	2,364	
Inverness Womens Aid	941	3,428	2,316		
Elgin Hospice Trust	1,670		3,058		
Glasgow and West of Scotland Society for the Deaf	3,081				
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme	149				
Albyn House Association	2,830	3,305	2,925	2,358	
Church of Scotland	30,730	25,947	32,496	26,812	16,446
Voluntary Service Aberdeen	9,079	3,066	8,705	14,399	16,001
Talbot Association	3,227	1,997	2,585	2,570	2,857
Barnardo's	5,653			4,607	9,018
Quarriers Homes	11,831	13,559	23,096	12,112	6,282
Salvation Army	11,437	8,252	15,105	5,835	4,330
Scottish Council for Spastics	4,631		15,983	2,367	2,940
St. Aidans Project	1,637	2,119	2,124	2,409	2,594
Margaret Blackwood Housing Association	2,035	3,740	2,570	3,137	3,344
Key Housing Association	10,184	17,505	32,851	14,365	2,715
Dundee Survival Group		3,092	738		2,997

Name of voluntary organisation	1986-87 £	1987-88 £	1988-89 £	1989-90 £	1990-91 £
Aberdeen Cyrenians	—	2,566	3,347	6,159	6,456
Wellington School	—	1,160	4,836	—	—
Aberdeen and North East Association for Mental Health	—	2,392	2,335	3,254	—
Grassmarket/Old Town Housing Association	—	6,822	3,116	—	2,750
Carolina House Trust	—	2,059	2,001	—	—
Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped	—	638	5,716	—	—
Lothian Allelon Society	—	551	2,736	1,818	—
Abbeyfield Quarriers Society	—	879	2,884	—	—
Springboig St. Johns School	—	3,656	5,002	3,661	—
Baroney Housing Association	—	1,699	4,336	4,735	—
National Childrens Home	—	—	2,492	—	5,500
Edinburgh and East of Scotland Society for the Deaf	—	—	6,234	3,639	—
Seabank House	—	—	1,991	2,424	2,289
Glengowan House	—	—	—	3,078	3,152
Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health	—	—	—	2,970	3,297
North Edinburgh Action Group	—	—	—	—	6,013
Raddery School	—	—	—	—	1,127
Save the Children Fund	—	—	—	—	2,750
Red Cross House	—	—	—	—	4,000
Totals	150,560	141,345	258,781	146,724	121,563

Fish Processing

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the fish processing industry to discuss future Government support for the industry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland met the Scottish Fish Merchants' Federation in October last year. This has been backed up by more recent meetings with officials.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; and if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 29 April 1991]:* Full information along the lines requested is not readily available for every year since 1979. The available information is set out in the table.

Statisticians

Year	Grade 5		Grade 7		Assistant/Senior Asst Stat	
	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC
1979	2	—	10	—	13	—
1980	2	—	10	—	11	—
1981	2	—	10	—	10	—
1982	1	—	10	—	8	—
1983	2	—	13	—	10	—
1984	2	—	12	—	10	—
1985	2	—	14	—	9	—
1986	2	0	11	0	11	0
1987	2	0	13	0	13	1
1988	2	0	13	0	10	1
1989	2	0	15	1	8	3
1990	2	0	16	0	10	3
1991	2	0	15	0	11	2

Administrative staff

Year	Senior Executive Officer		Higher Executive Officer		Executive Officer		Admin Officer		Admin Assistant		Personal Secretary	
	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC
1979	2	—	9	—	25	—	57	—	22	—	2	—
1980	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1981	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1982	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1983	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1984	2	—	6	—	27	—	49	—	23	—	2	—
1985	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1986	1	0	9	0	26	1	50	1	21	2	2	0
1987	1	0	9	0	26	1	49	0	24	2	2	0
1988	0	0	7	2	24	3	49	0	23	0	2	0
1989	0	0	9	0	25	1	48	0	22	0	2	0

Year	Senior Executive Officer		Higher Executive Officer		Executive Officer		Admin Officer		Admin Assistant		Personal Secretary	
	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC	SIP	VAC
1990	0	0	10	0	23	0	46	0	16	3	2	0
1991	1	0	7	0	23	0	41	2	16·5	0	2	0

Note: SIP = Staff in Post as at 1 April.
VAC = Vacant Posts as at 1 April. (Not available before 1986).

Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures showing the number of *(a)* twins, *(b)* triplets, *(c)* quadruplets, *(d)* quintuplets and *(e)* sextuplets born in Scotland in 1990; what was the total number of maternities in Scotland for that year; and what was the total number of multiple births of each type which were conceived as a result of (i) IVF, (ii) GIFT and (iii) other forms of assisted births.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The information is as follows:

	Number[1]
(i) *Type of Birth*	
Twin	731
Triplet	16
Quadruplets	1
Quintuplets	—
Sextuplets	—
(ii) Total confinements	65,556

[1] Provisional

Information on the number of multiple births attributed to assisted reproduction is not available.

Grampian Health Board

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to his answer of 25 April, *Official Report*, column *548*, whether he will now direct the Grampian health board to make its minutes available to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* I understand a copy of the relevant minutes were sent to the hon. Member on 2 May. I regret that this was not done sooner.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension Books

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the numbers and proportions of pensioners who are not receiving their new pension books by the date at which they come into force; and what action he is taking to prevent such occurrences.

Miss Widdecombe: Pension books normally go out three weeks before they are due. Exceptionally, delays may occur in a small number of cases. Detailed figures on such cases are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensioners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total percentage of pensioner units whose income did not exceed £5,000 at current prices for each of the last 10 years for the Doncaster area; and what is the national figure.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 5 February 1991, at column *134*, which gives the national figures requested. Information on particular areas is not available.

Community Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the level of funding of *(a)* community care loans and *(b)* grants, at his Department's offices in the Doncaster area; and what his response has been to-date.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency.

He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the numbers of claimants in receipt of invalidity benefit who will suffer a net loss of income arising from the recent uprating of invalidity benefit and its impact upon entitlement to housing and poll tax rebates and free national health service prescriptions.

Mr. Scott: Detailed information is not available. However, invalidity benefit recipients who are also in receipt of housing benefit and community charge benefit will normally be better off following an uprating. This is because applicable amounts for housing benefit and community charge benefit are uprated at the same time as increased invalidity benefit is taken into account. In addition, the housing benefit and community charge benefit tapers operate so that claimants normally retain at least part of any increase in their income. The applicable amounts used in assessing entitlement to help with prescription charges under the NHS low income scheme are also uprated at the same time as invalidity benefit.

Occupational Pensioners

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of occupational pensioners in the United Kingdom in 1970, 1980, and 1990 receiving pensions from local authorities; and what was the total amount paid in occupational pensions by local authorities in those years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not held centrally. Local authorities are responsible not only for the payment of pensions to their own former employees, who are members of the local government superannuation scheme but for the payment of pensions to retired firefighters and police officers who are members of schemes administered by the Home Office. In Scotland the Scottish Office is responsible for the administration of all such occupational pensions.

Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what would be the cost in 1991-92 of raising *(a)* one-parent benefit and *(b)* the widowed mother's allowance on behalf of the claimant, by 85p a week (i) assuming similar increases in income-related benefits for lone parents and widows and (ii) net of income-related benefits;

(2) what would be the cost in 1991-92 of raising one-parent benefit by £1·45 a week (i) assuming similar increases in income-related benefits for lone parents and (ii) net of income-related benefits.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The information requested is in the following table.

	Raising OPB and WMA by 85p a week £ *million*	*Raising OPB by £1·45 a week* £ *million*
(i) Assuming compensatory increases in income related benefits		
One-parent benefit	57	98
Widowed mother's allowance	3	
TOTAL	60	98
(ii) Assuming no increase in income related benefits		
One-parent benefit	17	30
Widowed mother's allowance	2	
TOTAL	19	30

Notes

1. The table shows:
   (i) The effects of increasing one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance and of making increases in the income related benefits to allow all claimants of one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance to get the full increases;
   (ii) The cost of increasing one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance without making such increases in the income related benefits. In this case increases in one parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance for people on income related benefits would be offset by reductions in those benefits.

2. It is not possible to get both one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give for each year from 1979-80, including 1991-92, the number of staff actually employed on 1 April and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of his Department.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 26 April 1991]* Functions which are commonly associated with press and public relations are carried out by the Department's headquarters information division.

Information for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 is not available in the form requested.

Date	*Staff in post*	*Complement*
1 April 1989	79	[1]86
1 April 1990	70·5	[2]81
1 April 1991	25	[3]34·5
From April 1991 the Benefits Agency became responsible for its own information service. The figures are as follows.		
1 April 1991	54	[4]56

[1] Of the complement 19 were Information Officer grades.
[2] Of the complement 22 were Information Officer grades.
[3] Of the complement 19 are Information Officer grades.
[4] Of the complement 14 are Information Officer grades.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Southern Health and Social Services (Finances)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he will take to improve the budgetary position of the Southern health and social services board in this current financial year.

Mr. Hanley: The Southern board has been allocated over £125 million in this financial year, an increase of £10·5 million. It will receive in addition a share of central money reserved for community care and have available the proceeds of its own cost improvements. It is for the board to formulate its operational plan for the use of these substantial resources in line with its declared priorities.

Road Fund Licences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of second-hand cars permanently exported from Great Britain to Northern Ireland for which the car owner has to apply for a new road fund licence document; and what is the average period of time between application for such documents and their being posted to the new owner.

Mr. Needham: In 1990, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland received applications for new vehicle registration documents for 16,675 previously registered vehicles permanently imported to Northern Ireland from Great Britain. The average time between receipt of a valid application and issue of the new registration document is 10 working days.

Doctors

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many doctors in general practice in each health board area in Northern Ireland are *(a)* Protestants, *(b)* Roman Catholics and *(c)* others; and in each category by board area, how many were trained in (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) the Irish Republic, (iii) Great Britain and (iv) overseas.

Mr. Hanley: General practitioners are self-employed independent contractors and as such information about their religious affiliation is not held.

A breakdown showing their places of graduation is set out below.

	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western	Total
Northern Ireland	316	170	108	69	663
Irish Republic	28	23	53	71	175
Great Britain	18	10	4	10	42
Overseas	4	8	6	7	25
Total	366	211	171	157	905

Employment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show (i) the number of employers or firms in Northern Ireland which employ more than 90 per cent. Protestants, (ii) the distribution of such firms by council area, (iii) the number of such firms in the following bands *(a)* 1-49, *(b)* 50-99 and *(c)* 100-plus employees; and, where such an employer has more than one establishment, where persons are employed treating each such different establishment as a separate entity.

Mr. Needham: From the 1,857 concerns with more than 25 employees which submitted monitoring returns to the Fair Employment Commission on the community composition of the work forces during the 1990 monitoring round, the information is:

1. There are 242 concerns which employ more than 90 per cent. Protestants.
2. The distribution by district council area is:

	Number
Londonderry	2
Limavady	1
Coleraine	6
Ballymoney	2
Moyle	2
Larne	2
Ballymena	18
Magherafelt	4
Cookstown	1
Strabane	1
Fermanagh	1
Dungannon	2
Craigavon	11
Armagh	5
Newry and Mourne	1
Banbridge	2
Lisburn	21
Antrim	4
Newtownabbey	24
Carrickfergus	6
North Down	13
Ards	10
Castlereagh	15
Belfast	88
Total	242

3. 140 have below 50 employees
   74 have 51-100 employees
   28 have over 100 employees.
4. The commission does not hold separate information on locations.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show *(a)* the number of employers or firms in Northern Ireland which employ more than 90 per cent. Roman Catholics, *(b)* the distribution of such firms by council area, *(c)* the number of such firms in the following bands (i) 1-49, (ii) 50-99, (iii) 100-plus employees; and, where such an employer has more than one establishment, where persons are employed treating each such different establishment as a separate entity.

Mr. Needham: From the 1,857 concerns with more than 25 employees which submitted monitoring returns to the Fair Employment Commission on the community composition of the work forces during the 1990 monitoring round, the information is.

1. There are 142 concerns which employ more than 90 per cent. Roman Catholics.
2. The distribution by district council area is:

Londonderry	20
Limavady	2
Moyle	1
Ballymena	1
Magherafelt	5
Cookstown	3
Strabane	5
Omagh	4
Fermanagh	10
Dungannon	10
Craigavon	6
Armagh	7
Newry and Mourne	27
Down	6
Lisburn	2
Antrim	3
Ards	1
Belfast	29
Total	142

3. 80 have below 50 employees
   44 have 51-100 employees
   18 have over 100 employees
4. The commission does not hold separate information on locations.

Fergal Caragher

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects a copy of the autopsy report on Fergal Caragher of Cullyhanna will be made availble to Mr. Caragher's widow; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under the Coroners (Practice and Procedures) Rules (NI) 1963 the question of whether and, if so, when to make available to properly interested persons a report of a post mortem examination of the body of a person whose death has been reported to a coroner is entirely a matter for the coroner concerned.

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many deaths are estimated to occur each year from health-related problems caused by work; and what is the total number of doctors and nurses employed by the Health and Safety Executive, excluding those working in employment rehabilitation centres.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive's current best estimate suggests that ill-health caused by work gives rise to at least 2,000 deaths a year and contributes to a further 8,000.

On 1 April 1991 there were 110 doctors and nurses employed by the HSE. This figure includes 22 nurses currently working in employment rehabilitation centres who will shortly be integrated with the local employment medical advisory service team.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the assessment and measurement of the quality of the work undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Forth: Maintaining the high quality of the work carried out by the Health and Safety Executive's staff is essential to the achievement of the organisation's aims and objectives. The nature of HSE's work, with its wide range of non-standard outputs based on professional judgments, makes it difficult to express output and performance in terms of indicators of both quantity and quality. Methods currently used to assess quality include, for example, systems for laboratory quality assurance, the application of medical audit, and reviews by management services staff, as well as the day-to-day quality assurance that comes from the management of professional staff by more senior professional colleagues. Other initiatives are currently being pursued, including one to examine the application of the concepts of total quality management in the HSE, which will include consideration of how more and better measures of quality might be devised to supplement the current range of performance measures.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why callers are no longer able to get through to the Health and Safety Executive's main public inquiry point at its Bootle headquarters; and when he expects the public inquiry point to reopen.

Mr. Forth: The public inquiry point at Bootle has been closed since the middle of 1990 and the Health and Safety Executive has no plans to reopen it, because it believes that inquiries can be effectively handled by the two remaining public inquiry points in London and Sheffield and through the national network of 20 area offices.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many CEN—European Committee for Standardisation—committees have representatives from the Health and Safety Executive sitting on them; and if he will list them.

Mr. Forth: At present 42 Health and Safety Executive staff are members of one or more delegations from the British Standards Institution to committees or working groups at CEN. HSE staff form part of the delegation to the CEN committees listed in the table below.

CEN committees where HSE staff form part of the United Kingdom delegation.

CEN TC 23
CEN TC 23 SC2
CEN TC 61
CEN TC 85 WG 4
CEN TC 114
CEN TC 122 WG 6
CEN TC 137
CEN TC 143
CEN TC 144 WG 1
CEN TC 144 WG 3
CEN TC 145 WG 4
CEN TC 148
CEN TC 148 WG 2
CEN TC 148 WG 4
CEN TC 162 WG 2
CEN TC 196
CEN TC 198 WG 1
CEN TC 201 WG 1
CEN TC 202 WG 1
CEN TC 212
CEN TC 214
CEN TC 231
CEN TC 269
CEN TC 23 SC1
CEN TC 54
CEN TC 93
CEN TC 114 WG 2
CEN TC 128
CEN TC 140
CEN TC 143 WG 1
CEN TC 144 WG 2
CEN TC 144 WG 7
CEN TC 147
CEN TC 148 WG 1
CEN TC 148 WG 3
CEN TC 151 WG 12
CEN TC 162 WG 4
CEN TC 196 WG 3
CEN TC 198 WG 2
CEN TC 201 WG 3
CEN TC 211
CEN TC 212 WG 3
CEN TC 214 WG 1
CEN TC 233
CEN/CENELEC TC 1

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how much time is used by Health and Safety Executive staff in recording work undertaken;

(2) if he will explain the reasons for the use of work recording systems in the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Forth: The HSE's principal resource is the time of its professional and administrative staff. Work recording plays a key part in the process of planning, monitoring and accounting for the time of staff allocated to particular activities, thus ensuring that resources are applied to meeting priority objectives.

The time spent by the HSE's staff in recording their activities is part of the administrative work associated with these activities, and is not itself separately recorded.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects the financial benefits of closing the Health and Safety Executive's Cricklewood laboratory and moving the work to Sheffield to be realised.

Mr. Forth: Many of the financial benefits of the relocation will begin to accrue from the outset, as the move will eliminate some of the requirements for support staff, London pay differentials, travel and subsistence, postage and telecommunication services, and so on. Other financial benefits will be felt at a later stage. For example, the expected lower turnover of staff when the laboratory is in Sheffield will be a major advantage, not only in terms of the research and laboratory services division's—RLSD—effectiveness but in reduced recruitment and training costs, etc.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will identify the number of premises, in each of the Health and Safety Executive regions which are subject to the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 which have not yet been issued

with a fire certificate by the Health and Safety Executive in accordance with the Fire Certificates (Special Premises) Regulations 1976.

Mr. Forth: Information is not readily available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action he intends to take to assist the Health and Safety Executive in overcoming the problems of under-reporting of accidents and the low level of registration by employers.

Mr. Forth: I am satisfied that the Health and Safety Executive is already taking and planning effective action to encourage both the reporting of accidents and registration by employers.

During visits to all workplaces, HSE inspectors give advice and guidance, remind employers of their responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and related legislation including the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1984 and when appropriate take action to secure compliance.

As part of planned preventive inspection, inspectors continue to seek out and inspect new and unregistered workplaces. To complement this, special initiatives have been, and will continue to be, mounted on a local or regional basis aimed specifically at both registered and unregistered small firms in defined geographical areas. Planned publicity for such targeted initiatives enables the HSE to get the health and safety message across and stimulate better standards of compliance with the legislation.

Additionally, between 1 July and 31 December 1991, the HSE plans to carry out a pilot exercise in seven areas to assess the feasibility of employing visiting officers to identify establishments for inspection. One of the objectives of the exercise, which will complement normal inspection arrangements is to seek out and indentify establishments not registered with the HSE.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the costs of attendance by Health and Safety Executive personnel at CEN committees is borne by the Health and Safety Executive and what by the European Commission.

Mr. Forth: The travel and subsistence costs of Health and Safety Executive staff attending CEN committees are at present met by the Health and Safety Executive. I understand that there are now arrangements whereby the CEC will pay to CEN a proportion of the costs of chairmen of committees and of the convenors of working groups. The Health and Safety Executive is discussing with the British Standards Institution how it will recover its share of such costs.

Agricultural and Factory Inspectors

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the differences in the quality of work required from principal agricultural inspectors and factory inspectors 1A.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive does not differentiate between the quality of work required from principal agricultural inspectors and factory inspectors 1A.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission about the effect of inflation on the level of activity of the Health and Safety Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: None. Once again, the Government have met in full the Health and Safety Commission's request for funds for the current financial year. In his letter to the Secretary of State enclosing the plan of work for 1991-92 and beyond, the commission's chairman confirmed that these funds enable the commission to take forward its plan of work for this financial year with no additional bid for resources. The plan of work will be published later this month.

Employment Medical Advisory Service

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what criteria are used to assess the suitability of appointed doctors; and how many doctors have had their status as appointed doctors withdrawn by EMAS;

(2) what proportion of doctors appointed by EMAS have qualifications in occupational health;

(3) how many appointed doctors are currently registered with EMAS; and how many days' training, on average, each received from EMAS staff.

Mr. Forth: There are currently 1,369 appointed doctors registered with EMAS. Approximately 40 per cent. of doctors currently appointed by EMAS hold formal qualifications in occupational health, and all are encouraged to take the Faculty of Occupational Medicine's 30 to 50 hours introductory course in occupational health.

Each doctor is provided with appropriate induction training prior to being appointed and all appointed doctors are normally given the opportunity to attend a one-day seminar run by EMAS on an annual basis in each HSE area/region. No records are maintained of the time spent training individual doctors.

The local senior employment medical adviser is required to ensure that any doctor seeking an appointment is suitable and competent and has the necessary facilities and equipment to carry out the required duties.

The Health and Safety Executive does not maintain historical data on the number of doctors who have had their status as appointed doctors withdrawn, but in recent years several hundred appointments have been no longer required as a result of legislative change.

Disabled People

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number and locations of the TECs which have any links with employment rehabilitation centres or asset centres or which have sought to place trainees with disabilities in these centres.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not held centrally. I know that training and enterprise councils will decide carefully what is best for people with special training needs.

Field Operations Divisions

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many categories of work are required to be recorded on the field operations division WR1 form.

Mr. Forth: Three forms WR1, currently in use by different parts of the field operations divisions, make provision for a combined total of 78 different categories of work to be recorded.

Employment Rehabilitation

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance has been given to training and enterprise councils on the services that can be provided by the employment rehabilitation service.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils have been advised that they are able to access the facilities of the employment rehabilitation service—ERS—as part of making appropriate arrangements for trainees with special needs.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice or guidance has been given in writing to employment rehabilitation and asset centre managers and staff on the role of psychology assistants; and whether in all cases the psychology assistants are working under the direct supervision and control of a higher or senior occupational psychologist.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the employment rehabilitation service.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 16 April 1991, *Official Report*, columns *157-59*.

Wath Recycling

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many visits have been paid to the premises of Wath Recycling by officials of his Department, including the Health and Safety Executive in connection with the toxic waste held at these premises since this material arrived in the summer of 1989.

Mr. Forth: Inspectors and specialist inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive have paid a total of 21 visits to the premises of Wath Recycling Ltd. in connection with the toxic waste held at the premises since its arrival in the summer of 1989.

Training

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish the anticipated unit cost per week of training disabled students by training and enterprise councils and local enterprise councils;

(2) if he will publish the anticipated unit cost per week of training able-bodies students by TECs and LECs;

(3) what percentage of financial resources made available by central Government to training and enterprise councils and local enterprise councils is to be allocated specifically for the training of disabled students by TECs and LECs.

Mr. Jackson: My Department funds each TEC on the basis of an agreed average unit cost per trainee week and per output achieved. The funding of training for able bodied people or people with disabilities is a matter for negotiation between TECs and their training providers. Funding arrangements for LECs are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of students seeking training at TECs and LECs will be *(a)* disabled and *(b)* able-bodied;

(2) what is the anticipated demand for training by disabled students through TECs and LECs.

Mr. Jackson: Forecasts are not available of the number of trainees with disabilities who may require and or obtain places on programmes run by TECs and LECs. The Government are committed to equal opportunities and action has been taken to ensure that there is no discrimination against people with disabilities.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Decommissioning Scheme

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with representatives of fishing organisations on the introduction of a decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Gummer: I regularly meet individual fishermen. Most recently I spent two days in north-east Scotland where I talked individually to a large number of fishermen from the region.

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what objectives he is setting for his consultative paper on agricultural tenancy legislation.

Mr. Gummer: Any reform must ensure that there is more land to let.

Milk

Mr. Burt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Milk Marketing Board on proposed changes to the milk marketing scheme.

Mr. Gummer: In March the Milk Marketing Board submitted proposals setting out the terms on which it might transform itself into a voluntary co-operative.

Beef

14. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to help British beef producers and to reduce the levels of beef intervention stocks.

Mr. Gummer: In the long term we will be pressing the Community to replace the present intervention system with a mechanism which provides more direct help to the farmer.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the slaughtering industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The Government fully support the principle of common health standards for all meat plants after 1992 and believe that there will continue to be opportunities for businesses of all sizes producing high-quality British meat products.

Organic Farming

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the extensification scheme for organic farming.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister has made clear the Government's intention to introduce a scheme under EC rules to help farmers who wish to convert to organic production. I hope that the European Commission's proposals on agriculture and the environment will provide the legal basis for the type of scheme we have in mind.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for encouraging the growing and sale of agricultural and horticultural produce free of additives, pesticides and non-organic fertilisers.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Minister and this Department have been long-time supporters of organic farming.

We expect to commission research projects shortly in hill grazing of livestock and on a mixed arable and pig unit.

Research is already under way on pests and diseases in organic winter wheat.

Animal Carcases

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide financial assistance to farmers to deal with the problem of disposal of animal carcases.

Mr. Maclean: No. As with all other industries it is the responsibility of the livestock sector to find ways of handling its waste within existing health and environmental controls.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the number of people employed in the state veterinary service in 1980 and 1990.

Mr. Gummer: The number of people employed in the state veterinary service on 1 January 1980 was 1,652 and on 1 January 1990, 1,402.

Fishing, North-East Scotland

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to visit the north-east of Scotland to study the local fishing industry.

Mr. Curry: I shall meet the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in advance of the next Council of Fisheries Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Minister visited Scotland last week and met fishermen in the course of his tour.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations his Department has received on methods of disposal of bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected carcases.

Mr. Maclean: We receive a number of representations on methods of disposal of carcases affected by BSE.

Birds (Imports)

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his recent decision to suspend imports of captive birds from Tanzania.

Mr. Maclean: In my reply of 20 February to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), *Official Report*, column 166, I explained that veterinary officials from the Ministry had visited several major exporting countries in order to impress upon their veterinary authorities the need to fulfil our import requirements and to follow International Air Transport Association standards during flights to the United Kingdom. I also made it clear that we would cease to authorise the import of birds from any country which failed to co-operate in implementing our requirements.

The issue of licences for import of captive birds from Tanzania was suspended because of the failure, despite numerous reminders, of the authorities there to respond to our request to send a veterinary official of the Department to discuss with them various animal health and welfare matters, the standard of health certification and the conditions under which future imports of captive birds would take place.

We have recently had a positive response from the authorities in Tanzania and one of our veterinary officials is arranging to make a visit this month. We have decided that, until we receive his report and are satisfied that imports of captive birds from Tanzania can take place under satisfactory health and welfare conditions, it would not be appropriate for the suspension of the issue of import licences to be lifted.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of humming birds imported into the United Kingdom in 1988 and 1989, indicating in each case the number dead on arrival and the number of deaths while in quarantine.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given below. Copies of the reports from which the figures are taken, "Imports of Birds—Mortality Statistics from Quarantine Returns", have been placed in the Library of the House.

	1988	*1989*
Humming birds imported[1]	128	158
Found dead on arrival	24	2
(Percentage dead on arrival)	(18·75)	(1·26)
Died in quarantine	62	51
(Percentage died in quarantine)	(48·44)	(32·28)

[1] Includes all species in the family Trochilidae (Humming birds).

Mr. Gould: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many (i) green-cheeked Amazon parrots and (ii) grey parrots were imported into the United Kingdom in each year since 1988.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given below. Copies of the reports from which the figures are taken, "Importation of Birds—Mortality Statistics from Quarantine Returns", have been placed in the Library of the House. Figures for the year 1990 are not yet available.

	Number of birds imported	
	1988	*1989*
(I) Green-cheeked Amazona (Amazon Viridigenalis)	22	17
(II) Grey parrot (Psittacus Erithacus)	5,565	6,043

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the annual running cost of the regional veterinary investigations centres relating to investigations of mortalities among imported birds.

Mr. Maclean: The estimated annual running cost of the veterinary investigation centres relating to investigations of mortalities among imported birds for the year April 1990 to March 1991 is of the order of £350,000 at full economic cost.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of imported wild birds which died after leaving quarantine for the most recent period for which data are available.

Mr. Maclean: Data on the number of imported birds which die after leaving quarantine are not collected by the Ministry.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been, for each year since 1984, the cost to the European Community of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: Expenditure from the European Community budget on the common agricultural policy was:

Year	*billion ecu*	*£ billion*
1984	19·0	11·1
1985	20·5	12·0
1986	22·9	14·8
1987	23·8	17·2
1988	28·8	19·6
1989	27·3	17·9
[1]1990	28·2	19·7

[1] provisional

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken by the Council of Agriculture Ministers to ensure that spending is maintained within the legal limits in the current calendar year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Agriculture Council is currently considering agricultural price proposals for the 1991-92 marketing years which are intended to keep CAP expenditure within the agricultural guideline in 1991.

Multi-annual Guidance Programme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to bring into effect in England the new multi-annual guidance programme from the European Commission.

Mr. Curry: No such programme yet exists.

Agricultural Land (Ownership)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of agricultural land in England and Wales is owned by overseas investors; and if he will list *(a)* the countries concerned and *(b)* the percentage of land owned by each.

Mr. Curry: I regret that no official statistics are available on such ownership of agricultural land.

Whaling

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has commissioned or published any research regarding the penthrite explosive harpoon method of whaling.

Mr. Curry: No, the United Kingdom ceased whaling in 1963. We have examined the reports made to the International Whaling Commission and see the need for a further review.

Flavoured Potato Crisps

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to resist the European Commission's proposal affecting the sale of flavoured potato crisps after 1992.

Mr. Curry: We are pressing the Commission to accept the amendment to that proposal which was put forward by the European Parliament. We shall take the matter up again in discussions in the Council if the Commission's revised proposals do not include the provision we are seeking.

Gumboro Disease

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the incidence of Gumboro disease in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: As Gumboro disease is not notifiable, accurate figures on its incidence are not available. Latest estimates suggest that there has been a slight improvement in the situation in the last year.

Sweeteners

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement outlining the procedures which Her Majesty's Government will be subject to in raising at the European Council of Ministers the issue of the exclusion of snack foods from the directive on sweeteners; and when the meeting will take place;

(2) what is the timetable of further procedures which the draft directive on sweeteners in food will undergo before coming into effect.

Mr. Maclean: The proposed directive on the use of sweeteners in foods is subject to the procedure for consultation with the European Parliament laid down in the Single European Act, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Following the European Parliament's first opinion, the Commission is now engaged in preparing a revised proposal for the Council. The Council will then seek to adopt a common position by qualified majority, after which the Parliament will have three months to reconsider it. Depending on the outcome of the Parliament's consideration, the Council may adopt the proposal, or the Commission may again amend it within one month. The Council must then act within three months or the proposal lapses. No more precise timetable can be given.

Quarantine Stations

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Ministry-approved quarantine stations are owned or managed by importers or traders in wildlife.

Mr. Maclean: All Ministry-approved quarantine premises, whether for foot and mouth disease, rabies or Newcastle disease, are privately owned, but information as to owners/ownership is not available in the precise form requested. However, in 1990, the Ministry approved 137 premises in England for the quarantine of small mammals, other than domestic dogs and cats, imported under the rabies import controls. In the same year the Ministry issued a total of 644 import licences in respect of consignments of captive birds to be landed in England. In each case the quarantine premises would have been subject to prior inspection and approval by the Ministry before the issue of a licence. Some of the bird quarantine premises will have been used, and thus approved, more than once during 1990.

Animals (Live Exports)

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received concerning the export of live horses and ponies; and what action he proposes to strengthen European legislation on this matter.

Mr. Maclean: The Government continue to receive many representations on this subject. Negotiations have recently resumed on the Commission's proposals for a new Community regulation on protection of animals during transport. The Government are pressing hard for the retention of measures which will prevent the export of horses and ponies for slaughter.

Nitrogens

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for reducing nitrogen use in farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We continually emphasise the need for farmers to avoid nitrogen fertiliser applications beyond good agricultural practice and we are pleased to note the reduction in autumn and total applications to key crops that has occurred since 1985.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 10 May 1991

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

RECHAR

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to meet the requirements of the European Commissioner to allow additional spending with regard to RECHAR; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry, for Northern Ireland, for Wales and for Scotland, and other Ministers, met Mr. Bruce Millan, European Commissioner with responsibility for regional policies, on 25 April to discuss issues relating to the Community's structural funds.

The proposed RECHAR programmes of grants for United Kingdom coalfield areas were one of the subjects discussed. The meeting helped reduce the misunderstanding there has been about the additionality of Community grants. We remain in touch with the Commission and hope that agreement will now soon be reached to enable these useful programmes to proceed.

Consumers' Deposits

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to ensure that deposits paid by consumers for goods or services are held in trust so that in the event of a company going into receivership, liquidation or bankruptcy, the deposit will be refunded to the consumer.

Mr. Leigh: We have no plans to introduce such legislation. The Government accepted the view of the Insolvency Law Review Committee that compulsory trust accounts would add to the costs and prices of businesses and would be detrimental to the interests of ordinary creditors. The Director General of Fair Trading is, however, continuing to keep this area under review, and we shall give careful consideration to any recommendations he may make.

Stormseal

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make an application against Mike and Mark Sweeney, formerly directors of Stormseal and now directors of Sure Style, under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, having particular regard to any responsibility they may have had for the Stormseal company becoming insolvent.

Mr. Redwood: Stormseal UPVC Window Co. Ltd. was one of a group of six companies that went into administrative receivership on 4 January 1991 and were controlled by brothers Mark and Michael Sweeney. Subsequently on 27 March 1991 winding-up orders were made against Stormseal and one other company Stirfront Ltd. and the official receiver at Manchester is dealing with their affairs. Both the administrative receiver and the official receiver have a responsibility under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 to consider the conduct of the directors and report any matters to the Secretary of State which they consider makes them unfit to be concerned in the management of a company.

An initial report is required to be submitted within six months of the appointment of the administrative receiver, but it is understood that the complexity of the affairs of the Stormseal group makes it unlikely that a full report will be able to be prepared by June 1991. On receipt of the full reports from the administrative receiver and the official receiver, the Secretary of State will consider whether it is appropriate to apply for disqualification of the said directors or any other persons involved in the affairs of the group.

National Film Commission

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to take a decision on the film industry's proposal for a national film commission.

Mr. Leigh: I am happy to announce that the Government have decided to invite Sydney Samuelson to establish a United Kingdom film commission to promote the United Kingdom as a place to make films and that the commission will receive grants from the DTI totalling £3·5 million over the next four years. The Department will discuss with the commission detailed terms and conditions.

Industry Council

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the discussions which took place in the EC Industry Council on 29 April.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The Industry Council meeting on 29 April, which Lord Hesketh attended for the United Kingdom, discussed Commission communications on the European electronics and information technology industry, the biotechnology industry and the future of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty. The Council also discussed Community policy on small and medium-sized enterprises and adopted a resolution reaffirming the Council's commitment to promoting the creation and development of small firms throughout the European Community.

Post Office

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what proposals he has to privatise Post Office Counters Ltd;

(2) what preparations Post Office Counters Ltd. is making for privatisation;

(3) what representations he has received concerning the re-establishment of a sub-post office at Newhill, near Rotherham; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what is his policy on the provision of sub-post offices.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 May 1991]:* The Government have made it clear on a number of occasions that we remain fully committed to the maintenance of a network of post offices adequate to enable the Post Office

to fulfil its statutory duty to have regard to economy and efficiency, and to the social, commercial and industrial needs of the United Kingdom. I am satisfied that in managing its network of post offices the Post Office is fully meeting these obligations.

We have at present no plans for the privatisation of the Post Office. Girobank has been successfully transferred to the private sector, but no other decisions have been taken.

It has been the policy of successive Governments since the establishment of the Post Office as a public corporation in 1969 that decisions concerning aspects of the day-to-day running of the postal business, such as those relating to the level of service provision available in particular areas, are the operational responsibility of the Post Office Board. The Government's role in Post Office matters is confined to broad issues of general policy and to matters of overall control.

I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no representations concerning the re-establishment of a sub-post office at Newhill, Rotherham.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Zoological Society

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when grants were first made to the Zoological Society of London in connection with scientific research; what has been the total grant paid to date; and what is the proposed grant for the current financial year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department of the Environment first provided funds specifically for the society's Institute of Zoology of £1·3 million in 1988-89. Responsibility for public funding of the institute was transferred to my Department through the Universities Funding Council and the university of London in April 1989. The transfer was accompanied by an increase in public funding through the UFC in respect of the university of London of £1·3 million in the 1989-90 financial year and £1·4 million in the subsequent two financial years. The actual level of funding for the institute is strictly a matter for the university of London. In addition, the institute received grants from the research councils and the Royal Society of £0·5 million in 1989-90.

Humanities (Postgraduate Studentships)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the recent change in the arrangements for the administration of the postgraduate state studentship scheme in the humanities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Since 1984 the British Academy has administered the national scheme for postgraduate studentships in the humanities on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Full responsibility for the scheme was transferred to the academy which, with effect from the beginning of this financial year, administers it in its own right. It continues to receive funds for this purpose from my Department.

WALES

Regional Policy

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement following his discussion with the Commissioner for regional policy of the European Community held on 15 April.

Mr. David Hunt: Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and other ministerial colleagues, I met European Commissioner Millan on 25 April.

We discussed a wide range of European structural fund matters. Commissioner Millan assured me that a decision on the Dyfed-Gwynedd-Powys integrated development operation programme would be made shortly.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. David Hunt: The readily available information about the appointments for which I am responsible, a number of which will fall to be made in 1991 and 1992, is in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to institute a review of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Given the proposed changes in the education service, I think that this is an opportune moment to conduct an in-depth review of the role and structure of Her Majesty's inspectorate in Wales. I am putting in hand arrangements for such a review.

THE ARTS

Paisley Pattern

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister for the Arts what plans he has to fund a heritage centre to show the history of and to promote the sale of articles in the paisley pattern; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have no plans to fund such a heritage centre. My funding responsibility does not extend to museums in Scotland, where I assume that such a centre would be based.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passport Service

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be in a position to reply to the correspondence of the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon requesting a passport for Mrs. Williams of Blaengwynfi, Port Talbot.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I wrote to the right hon. and learned Gentleman about this matter on 22 January. Unfortunately, he does not appear to have received the letter. My office has now forwarded a further copy which I trust he has received.

Gloucester Prison

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the ratio of prison staff to inmates at Gloucester prison for each of the last three years; and what was the comparable figure in the five prisons nearest to it in size.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 1 April 1991, the ratio of prison officers to inmates in local prisons, including principal and senior officers but excluding female establishments, ranged from 0·34 to 0·71 officers per inmate. This variation reflects differences in workload, scale and the particular facilities contained in establishments.

Over the past three years, the ratios at Her Majesty's Prison Gloucester and at the five local prisons nearest to it in size, by number of inmates, were as follows:

Officers per inmate

	1 April 1988	*1 April 1989*	*1 April 1990*	*1 April 1991*
Gloucester	0·45	0·45	0·44	0·48
Bedford	0·50	0·54	0·56	0·68
Shrewsbury	0·33	0·44	0·42	0·53
Leicester[1]	0·49	0·54	0·63	0·70
Reading	0·40	0·51	0·56	0·55
Swansea	0·39	0·51	0·57	0·53

[1] Including special unit

Private Prisons

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he considers to be appropriate profit levels in privately run penal establishments.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend will take a view on what profit levels are appropriate when considering bids for the operation of Wolds remand prison. The profit level in any agreed contract would, however, be regarded as commercially confidential.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to provide for the proper training of managers, social workers and guards in privately run penal establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The director and other custodial staff of any contracted-out prison would require training to a level specifically approved by my right hon. Friend. The training requirement for Wolds remand prison is set out in schedule 3(b) of the tender documents and is available in the Library. Any social workers engaged by contractors would require the qualifications of their profession.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners he expects to be situated in privately run penal establishments by 31 December 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: On present plans the management of Wolds remand prison, which will hold some 300 prisoners, would be contracted out in 1992. No decisions have yet been taken about any extension of contracting out. Any such proposals would be subject to parliamentary approval in accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill.

River Tweed (Boats)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received any proposals for bye-laws to be confirmed relating to the launching of boats in the River Tweed in the borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Haslar Project

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons he has withdrawn the Home Office grant for the Haslar project concerned with refugees.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 3 May at column *340*.

Somalis

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the Merseyside immigration unit to discuss the number of Somalis who are seeking to join their family in Liverpool.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend and I do not consider that a meeting at this time would be productive. If there are any particular problems of concern to the Merseyside immigration and advice unit, we should be happy to consider any written representation it wishes to make.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Somali citizens are seeking settlement in *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* Merseyside at the latest date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information is of the number of Somali nationals granted settlement in the United Kingdom, figures for which are published in table 15 of the Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1989" Cmnd. 1124 a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average waiting time for Somali refugees to join their relatives in Liverpool at the most recent date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The average time between receipt of an application in the asylum division and a decision is 16 months.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to improve replies from Lunar house to solicitors and community bodies concerning Somalis seeking settlement in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Because of very large-scale increases in the number of asylum applications from Somalis and other nationalities and the concession operated by the Government for Somalis seeking to join their families in this country, a large amount of work continues to be generated in the asylum division of the immigration and nationality department. On 26 April my right hon. Friend announced a nearly fivefold increase in staff resources for this division. It will take time to recruit and train such a large number of additional staff, but I would expect that in due course decisions will be able to be taken more quickly than at present.

Breathalysers

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions, advice or other forms of commercial or contractual restrictions have been issued by his Department to the manufacturers or distributors of breathalysers in the United Kingdom on the retail supply of such devices to the public; and if he will list the respective authorities on which they are based.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No such instructions have been issued.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list by nationality the numbers of nationals seeking asylum in the United Kingdom whose applications have been outstanding for *(a)* one month, *(b)* six months, *(c)* 12 months, *(d)* 18 months and *(e)* 24 months; and, of these, how many are in detention;

(2) if he will list the number of asylum seekers by nationality detained at *(a)* Hardmondsworth, *(b)* Haslar and *(c)* HM prisons for a period in excess of (i) one month, (ii) two months, (iii) three months, (iv) four months, (v) five months, (vi) six months and (vii) seven months.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* A breakdown by nationality of the number of asylum applications which have currently been awaiting a decision for less than 12 months is not readily available because of delays in recording. Approximate estimates of applications awaiting a decision for between 12 and 24 months are given in table A. Reliable information on cases outstanding for more than 24 months is not available.

Available information on asylum applicants detained is given in table B. No applicants currently detained have been in detention for more than 18 months.

Table A

Approximate estimates[1] [2] of asylum applicants awaiting a decision in the United Kingdom for between 12 and 24 months, by nationality and length of time outstanding

Number of persons

	Outstanding for between 12 and 18 months[3]	*Outstanding for between 18 and 24 months[3]*
Angolan	160	110
Bangladeshi	10	*
Colombian	20	5
Czechoslovakian	*	15
Ethiopian	220	155
Ghanaian	320	150
Indian	555	280
Iranian	65	95
Iraqi	50	35
Lebanese	10	5
Libyan	*	10
Pakistani	280	40
Polish	5	10
Seychellois	10	10
Somalian	125	150
South African	10	5
Sri Lankan	1,415	650
Sudanese	95	60
Turkish	210	345
Ugandan	465	250
Zairois	750	270
Other and unknown nationality	210	170
GRAND TOTAL	4,990	2,810

[1] As at 26 April 1991. Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with '*' = less than 3.

[2] Including associated dependants.

[3] Figures for African countries may understate because of delays in recording applications: those for other countries may overstate, because of under-recording of decisions made earlier.

Table B: Asylum applicants detained[1], by nationality, place of detention and length of detention

Number of persons

Nationality	*Harmondsworth[2]*	*Haslar[2]*	*Her Majesty's prisons[2]*	*Total*
(i) *Detained for between one and two months*				
Angolan	2	—	—	2
Bangladeshi	5	—	7	12
Colombian	—	1	—	1
Gambian	—	—	1	1
Ghanaian	—	1	—	1
Indian	—	1	4	5
Nigerian	1	—	1	2
Pakistani	—	—	2	2
Turkish	—	1	6	7
Zairois	—	1	1	2
Nationality doubtful	—	—	1	1
Total	8	5	23	36
(ii) *Detained for between two and three months*				
Albanian	—	1	—	1
Angolan	1	—	—	1
Bangladeshi	5	—	1	6

Nationality	Harmondsworth[2]	Haslar[2]	Her Majesty's prisons[2]	Total
Colombian	1	—	—	1
Ethiopian	—	1	—	1
Ghanaian	8	3	—	11
Guyanan	—	—	1	1
Indian	—	1	—	1
Iraqi	—	1	—	1
Nigerian	—	2	—	2
Turkish	—	1	2	3
Zairois	2	1	—	3
Total	17	11	4	32
(iii) *Detained for between three and four months*				
Algerian	—	1	—	1
Angolan	—	—	3	3
Bulgarian	—	1	—	1
Egyptian	—	1	—	1
Ghanaian	—	—	1	1
Indian	—	—	1	1
Iranian	—	—	1	1
Lebanese	—	—	1	1
Romanian	2	—	—	2
Sri Lankan	1	—	—	1
Turkish	—	—	1	1
Total	3	3	8	14
(iv) *Detained for between four and five months*				
Algerian	—	1	—	1
Angolan	1	—	—	1
Ghanaian	—	1	—	1
Turkish	—	—	1	1
Zairois	—	—	2	2
Total	1	2	3	6
(v) *Detained for between five and six months*				
Ghanaian	—	—	6	6
Indian	—	—	1	1
Nigerian	—	1	—	1
Total	—	1	7	8
(vi) *Detained for between six and seven months*				
Bangladeshi	—	1	—	1
Ghanaian	—	1	—	1
Pakistani	1	—	1	2
Zairois	1	1	1	3
Total	2	3	2	7
(vii) *Detained for between seven and twelve months*				
Angolan	—	2	—	2
Colombian	1	—	—	1
Ghanaian	—	5	—	5
Jordanian	—	1	—	1
Turkish	—	1	—	1
Zairois	1	1	4	6
Total	2	10	4	16
(viii) *Detained for longer than twelve months*				
Ghanaian	—	1	—	1
Total	—	1	—	1

[1]Persons detained, as at 26 April 1991, solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work. For the latter, the figures exclude persons whose asylum application was refused but who remained in detention.

[2]Any asylum applicant detained for longer than one month is held in one of these locations.

Football Licensing Authority

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many administrative staff are currently in post at the Football Licensing Authority; how many more administrative staff it is planned to appoint; and what will be the time scale of such appointments.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 8 May 1991]:* The number of staff employed by the Football Licensing Authority is a matter entirely within the authority's own discretion. I understand, however, that seven administrative staff are currently in post, and that, while there are no current plans to increase that number, the position will be kept under review.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Director of Works

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, how much has been paid to headhunters Saxton Bampfylde for the process of selecting a Director of Works for the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Beith: £20,871·86.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visit

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to make an official visit to the Paisley, South constituency; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so. I am visiting Scotland today to attend the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association conference.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to meet representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) on 18 April 1991 at columns 568-69.

Press Office

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the criteria used to govern the activities of his press office; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My press office operates under the same rules as govern the activities of other civil servants —namely, the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the December 1987 Armstrong note on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers. Information officers are involved, as a proper part of their duties, in the processes of presentation of Government policies and decisions.

Economic Regions

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Prime Minister (1) which Minister is responsible for keeping under review the relevance of the boundaries of the economic regions; and what is the procedure for altering those boundaries;

(2) whether he will publish a table showing which departments *(a)* collect or publish statistics based on the economic regions and *(b)* allocate grants, wholly or in part, on a regional basis, using the economic regions for such allocations, and statistics based on such regions.

The Prime Minister: In considering any proposal to alter the boundaries of the 11 standard regions of the United Kingdom, the Secretary of State for the Environment would take the lead in consultation with colleagues.

A large number of Departments collect or publish statistics based on standard regions. "Regional Trends 25" (HMSO) brings together a very wide range of such statistics and attributes them to the appropriate departmental sources. It is available in the House of Commons Library.

Grants are not allocated, wholly or in part, on the basis of standard regions in England.

Antarctica

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the recent Antarctic meeting in Madrid.

The Prime Minister: The Government warmly welcome the outcome of the Madrid meeting and hope that the draft protocol tabled there will provide the basis for the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment which has always been the Government's objective.

Of particular importance are the provisions for a ban on mineral activity for 50 years, and mechanisms for a review of the ban after 50 years, or before if everyone agrees. The results of these provisions would be that there can never be mining in Antarctica unless all the present consultative parties agree.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Staff

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show the number of persons employed by the Northern Ireland Office in Northern Ireland and the areas of Northern Ireland from which they are drawn, the number of Roman Catholics, the number of Protestants and the number of others and the religious composition of the population of the areas from which the persons are drawn between the ages of 18 and 64 years.

Dr. Mawhinney: A significant proportion of the home civil service staff employed in the Northern Ireland Office in Northern Ireland are from Great Britain. They were educated outside Northern Ireland and their community background has not been determined. It would not be appropriate to provide the information sought.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show the number of persons employed by the civil service in Northern Ireland, the areas of Northern Ireland from

which they are drawn, the number of Roman Catholics, the number of Protestants and the number of others, the religious composition of the areas from which they are drawn in the age group 18 to 64 years and the religious composition of the Northern Ireland population in the same age group.

Dr. Mawhinney: The numbers and composition in terms of the community background of Northern Ireland civil servants are given in a regular series of reports issued by the Northern Ireland civil service's equal opportunities unit, the most recent of which was published during October 1989. Copies of this and the two previous reports are in the Library.

The third report, besides giving information about the numbers and community background of Northern Ireland civil servants, also gave an estimate as to labour availability. For this it drew on the continuous household survey for the years 1985 to 1987 regarding economically active persons aged 16 and over. Details for the age group 18 to 64 are not readily available. The table gives the relevant information.

	Percentage Protestant	*Percentage Roman Catholic*	*Percentage Others*
Northern Ireland Civil Service	55·3	34·5	10·2
Economically active population estimate	60·9	35·5	3·6

In the main, the Northern Ireland civil service recruits on a Northern Ireland basis. The community background of successful candidates plays no part in determining where such candidates are posted. For this reason, it has not been considered appropriate to monitor applications and/or appointments other than on a Northern Ireland basis. Information regarding the community background of staff based on the areas of Northern Ireland from which they are drawn is not therefore available. Such analyses could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cambodia (Peace Plan)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on additions to the permanent five peace plan for Cambodia, proposed recently by Japan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We welcome Japan's active involvement in the peace process. We are carefully considering the Japanese proposals concerning the ceasefire arrangements and measures to prevent the recurrence of genocide, although both the state of Cambodia and China have expressed reservations.

TRANSPORT

Breathalysers

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will now take steps to permit and encourage the advertising and retail sale of self-testing breathalyser devices and procedures.

Mr. Chope: Those wishing to advertise and sell self-testing breathalyser devices are free to do so. As in any commercial endeavour, the demands of the marketplace are likely to provide the most effective form of encouragement.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Solicitors Complaints Bureau

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Attorney-General how many complaints have been received about the legal profession from judges, lawyers, members of the public and the lay observer during the past 12 months; and what assessments he has made of the efficiency of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau.

The Attorney-General: This information is not available in the form requested. The responsibility for any assessment of the efficiency of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau lies with the Law Society.

The Government responded to disquiet about the handling of complaints about the legal profession by establishing under the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 the office of Legal Services Ombudsman, to be independent of government and the profession, and to have a wider range of powers than the lay observer whom he replaced. The Legal Services Ombudsman will present an annual report to the Lord Chancellor which will be laid before Parliament.

DEFENCE

Efficiency Exercise Incentive Scheme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance he has issued on the uses to which money awarded under the Department's efficiency exercise incentive scheme can be put; and how the expenditure of such moneys is monitored.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Guidance was issued to management areas about the way money awarded under the Department's trial efficiency incentive scheme was to be used. The guidelines stated that the scheme was intended to provide as much flexibility as possible on the type of project on which a management area chose to spend its reward, provided that the project did not breach Treasury guidelines and complied with departmental instructions on propriety and value for money; and that the project should benefit the defence community as a whole and/or contribute to its future efficiency. Proposals for projects on which management areas wished to spend their rewards were required to be approved by the relevant service executive committee member, commander-in-chief or the chief of defence procurement, and also by the relevant senior finance officer. Details were reported to a central point where the expenditure could be monitored against the sums awarded.

NATO

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how and when he expects to make known to the House the results of NATO's review of its role, force levels and the deployment of allied forces in Europe, following the end of the cold war and east-west agreement on conventional forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work on NATO's strategy review is continuing. We will keep the House informed.

NGOs (Appointments)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to "Public Bodies 1990" issued by the office of the Minister for the Civil Service in December 1990; pages 12 to 14 list Ministry of Defence appointments. Relevant information is also in "Public Appointments: a Handbook for Women's Organisations", pages 31 to 37, published by the Women's National Commission. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Buccaneer and Tornado Aircraft

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, on completion of his assessment of the performance of RAF equipment in Operation Desert Storm, he will make a statement on the operational benefits, including target identification and accuracy, of Buccaneer and Tornado aircraft working together.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The performance of all aircraft and equipment used in the Gulf is still being evaluated. We have not yet decided how the results of this work might be made public.

Sea King Helicopters

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to order Sea King helicopters to replace or supplement older helicopters in the search and rescue role; and when he will announce his decision on replacement search and rescue aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: Although the Wessex continues to make a valuable contribution to the search and rescue service, we are examining the case for its replacement as part of the MOD's normal equipment planning process. An announcement will be made once a decision is taken.

HEALTH

Cryptosporidiosis

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current incidence of cryptosporidiosis in the Battersea area.

Mr. Dorrell: An increased number of cases of cryptosporidiosis has been reported from the Wandsworth area. A detailed investigation into the cause of the increase is being conducted by the local consultant in communicable disease control with the support of the Public Health Laboratory Service.

Severely Disabled People

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with representatives from disability organisations on the need to secure future local authority payments to severely disabled people to enable them to make their own personal assistance arrangements.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have had several such discussions, most recently at a meeting with the Spinal Injuries Association in March.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is still his policy to retain the legal prohibition on local authorities from making payments to severely disabled people to employ their own personal care assistants; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: During the passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the Government gave careful consideration to an amendment to allow local authorities to make payments direct to those in need of services, but decided not to do so because of the difficulties in determining which clients would be eligible for direct payments and in controlling costs. However, our guidance stresses the need for disabled people to be fully involved in decisions about the care which they need and points out that there is no reason why a disabled person who wants to have day-to-day management of his or her carers should not do so.

Hip Fractures

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of hospital episodes for hip fractures distinguishing between men and women, and women aged over 75 years nationally and in each health authority region, in each year since 1980; and what is his estimate of the total annual national cost of these procedures.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 30 April 1991]:* Information is given in the table about the estimated numbers of discharges and deaths from 1980 to 1985 and finished consultant episodes between 1987-88 and 1989-90 for hip fractures. Information is not available centrally on the total annual national cost of these procedures.

Estimated numbers of discharges and deaths (1980 to 1985) and finished consultant episodes (1987-88 to 1989-90) where principal diagnosis was ICD 820: Fracture of neck or femur by RHA of residence

1980

	Male	*Female*	
	All ages	*Over 75*	*All ages*
England	8,750	21,874	30,511
Northern	698	1,212	1,797
Yorkshire	637	1,766	2,362
Trent	965	2,352	2,968
East Anglia	370	791	1,130
North West Thames	513	1,119	1,736
North East Thames	709	1,715	2,270
South East Thames	750	2,136	2,845
South West Thames	606	1,766	2,331
Wessex	462	1,469	1,920
Oxford	308	637	1,027
South Western	606	2,105	2,896
West Midlands	924	2,300	3,420
Mersey	257	791	1,253
North Western	945	1,715	2,557

1981

	Male	*Female*	
	All ages	*Over 75*	*All ages*
England	8,904	22,409	30,670
Northern	541	1,234	1,846
Yorkshire	663	1,897	2,499
Trent	918	2,601	3,346
East Anglia	275	949	1,224

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
North West Thames	592	1,010	1,469
North East Thames	704	1,683	2,244
South East Thames	877	2,152	2,887
South West Thames	592	1,703	2,275
Wessex	581	1,387	1,805
Oxford	214	918	1,244
South Western	571	1,703	2,295
West Midlands	989	2,346	3,335
Mersey	530	969	1,397
North Western	857	1,856	2,805

1982

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	8,994	23,095	31,835
Northern	590	1,516	2,218
Yorkshire	743	1,913	2,686
Trent	1,119	2,452	3,256
East Anglia	346	987	1,445
North West Thames	539	1,302	1,811
North East Thames	733	1,608	2,320
South East Thames	804	2,035	2,706
South West Thames	712	1,852	2,381
Wessex	366	1,292	1,923
Oxford	315	926	1,201
South Western	529	1,730	2,269
West Midlands	1,058	2,635	3,602
Mersey	387	997	1,424
North Western	753	1,852	2,594

1983

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	9,157	24,277	33,032
Northern	494	1,483	2,235
Yorkshire	834	2,122	2,719
Trent	1,123	2,709	3,708
East Anglia	309	1,236	1,710
North West Thames	474	1,277	1,720
North East Thames	721	1,813	2,575
South East Thames	772	2,070	2,812
South West Thames	505	1,648	2,163
Wessex	556	1,514	2,029
Oxford	288	834	1,009
South Western	814	1,936	2,482
West Midlands	1,112	2,297	3,389
Mersey	546	1,092	1,483
North Western	608	2,245	2,997

1984

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	8,450	25,256	33,541
Northern	596	1,521	2,107
Yorkshire	555	1,943	2,631
Trent	802	2,703	3,454
East Anglia	493	1,203	1,562
North West Thames	473	1,511	2,015
North East Thames	514	1,953	2,601
South East Thames	586	2,446	3,094
South West Thames	565	1,758	2,292
Wessex	545	1,614	2,087
Oxford	319	730	1,038
South Western	555	2,015	2,703
West Midlands	1,182	2,344	3,392
Mersey	411	1,367	1,747
North Western	853	2,148	2,817

1985

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	9,700	26,272	34,703
Northern	609	1,496	2,177
Yorkshire	867	2,301	3,106
Trent	939	2,827	3,508
East Anglia	351	1,125	1,538
North West Thames	578	1,269	1,847
North East Thames	887	2,023	2,590
South East Thames	640	2,353	3,106
South West Thames	702	1,713	2,270
Wessex	609	1,507	1,981
Oxford	258	929	1,218
South Western	774	2,126	2,745
West Midlands	1,218	3,085	3,890
Mersey	454	1,383	1,744
North Western	815	2,136	2,982

1987-88[1]

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	9,055	25,049	32,707

1988-89

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	8,677	25,722	33,371
Northern	513	1,309	1,702
Yorkshire	514	1,462	1,936
Trent	989	2,506	3,215
East Anglia	388	1,173	1,464
North West Thames	572	1,824	2,369
North East Thames	678	2,027	2,750
South East Thames	772	2,298	2,839
South West Thames	535	1,829	2,329
Wessex	575	2,263	2,779
Oxford	252	878	1,235
South Western	840	2,697	3,354
West Midlands	825	2,306	3,078
Mersey	463	1,252	1,646
North Western	765	2,264	3,047

1989-90

	Male All ages	Female Over 75	Female All ages
England	10,303	30,295	38,622
Northern	752	1,919	2,515
Yorkshire	627	1,944	2,478
Trent	939	3,022	3,832
East Anglia	491	1,366	1,780
North West Thames	782	2,177	2,846
North East Thames	940	2,467	3,210
South East Thames	800	3,146	3,848
South West Thames	608	2,174	2,623
Wessex	725	2,660	3,304
Oxford	390	1,094	1,381
South Western	767	2,014	2,424
West Midlands	953	2,837	3,588
Mersey	574	1,477	1,940
North Western	1,000	2,229	2,917

[1] Data for 1987-88 are not available centrally by region of residence.

Notes:

Data for 1986 are not available.

The figures for 1987-88 onwards are provisional estimates based on incomplete data and may be subject to revision when ongoing analysis has been completed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Claims

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current figures in *(a)* numbers and *(b)* time involved in waiting for claims to be dealt with; and what were the figures 12 months ago.

Miss Widdecombe: The total number of claims received and the average clearance time for the month or quarter ending 31 March, and the comparable figures for March 1990 are in the table.

Benefit	*Month ending 31 March 1991*		*Month ending 31 March 1990*	
	Number received	*Average clearance (days)*[1]	*Number received*	*Average clearance (days)*[1]
Income support	352,299	5	298,705	5
Sickness/Invalidity	88,867	8	90,391	9
Retirement pension	47,128	19	46,407	21
Family credit	81,696	73 per cent. within 20 days	77,694	—
Invalid care allowance	5,683	35	5,342	40
Severe disablement allowance	764	32	707	32
War disablement pension	3,277	37 per cent. within 125 days	3,573	36 per cent. within 125 days
War widows pension	508	63 per cent. within 50 days	401	64 per cent. within 50 days
Attendance allowance	39,264	42	39,208	42
Mobility allowance	21,079	50	23,916	35
Child benefit				
straightforward claims	37,431	96 per cent. within 5 days	42,879	100 per cent. within 5 days
non-straightforward claims	27,152	82 per cent. within 16 days	30,495	95 per cent. within 16 days
One parent benefit	15,650	85 per cent. within 12 days	17,438	93 per cent. within 12 days

[1] Rounded.

Benefit	*Quarter ending 31 March 1991*		*Quarter ending 31 March 1990*	
	Number received	*Average clearance (days)*[1]	*Number received*	*Average clearance (days)*[1]
Widows benefit	14,994	15	15,984	15
Maternity allowance	27,611	10	31,377	12

[1] Rounded.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Miss Widdecombe: The readily available information about the appointments for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible, a number of which fall to be made in 1991 and 1992, is given in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library.

Mortgages

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will indicate how many mortgages supported by DSS interest payments total (i) over £700,000, (ii) £600,000 to £700,000, (iii) £500,000 to £600,000, (iv) £400,000 to £500,000, (v) £300,000 to £400,000, (vi) £200,000 to £300,000, (vii) £100,000 to £200,000, (viii) £50,000 to £100,000 and (ix) under £50,000; what is the average weekly interest paid by the DSS in each band; and what is the total DSS payment of interest for each band.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information about the amount of weekly loan interest included in the assessment of income support is collected and is published in the income support annual statistical enquiry. A copy of the 1989 enquiry is in the Library; the 1990 enquiry will be available shortly.

Residential Care Allowance

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the level of funding provided by way of the residential care allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated annual expenditure on income support for claimants in residential care at August 1990 was £772 million, excluding nursing homes.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the adequacy of residential care allowances.

Miss Widdecombe: A number of representations have been received recently both from individuals and representative bodies.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he takes to monitor the impact on rent levels and the number of tenancies in the private, housing association and local authority sectors of the residential care allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: The higher income support limits for people in residential care homes are based on costs of care, not on charges by the homes or on housing costs and occupancy rates prevailing in the community as a whole. Residents in local authority homes do not receive the higher income support levels of benefit.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for cold weather payments have been received by his Department since 1 January; and how many claims were (i) approved, (ii) refused and (iii) still outstanding at 30 April.

Mr. Scott: The information will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Gulf: Crisis Loans

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston's letters of 7 March and 14 April regarding the Gulf crisis: crisis loans.

Mr. Jack: I apologise for the delay in the Department not replying sooner to the hon. Member's letters. Following receipt of the letters, work has been undertaken to fully examine the circumstances of the hon. Member's constituent, and to recheck the information given in the reply he received from the local office manager on 29 January. The case has a number of factors which are being given careful consideration, but inquiries should shortly be completed and a reply will be sent to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Disablement Benefits

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving industrial disablement at each rate at the last date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the figures by sex and standard age cohorts.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 1 May 1991]:* The information is in the table.

Industrial disablement pensions assessments current at 31 March 1990

Males

		Percentage all assessment								
	Total all ages	*10*[1]	*20*[1]	*30*	*40*	*50*	*60*	*70*	*80*	*90*	*100*
All ages	167,940	13,180	67,580	41,370	19,960	9,980	6,240	3,140	2,180	860	3,450
Under 18	30	—	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
18-19	290	—	170	30	70	10	10	—	—	—	—
20-24	1,480	—	920	220	160	60	50	10	30	10	20
25-29	3,120	20	1,710	770	250	100	110	60	10	10	80
30-34	5,170	70	2,710	1,290	470	190	170	80	30	20	140
35-39	6,880	110	3,420	1,670	650	370	230	130	80	70	150
40-44	10,850	260	5,030	2,720	1,210	550	360	260	150	70	240
45-49	13,670	410	5,840	3,340	1,820	900	500	170	240	80	370
50-54	17,170	870	7,380	4,180	2,100	1,000	520	330	170	100	520
55-59	20,150	1,240	8,030	5,570	2,550	1,150	700	350	230	10	320
60-64	25,030	2,250	9,640	6,190	3,410	1,360	910	420	370	100	380
65-69	25,480	2,730	9,320	6,420	2,920	1,670	990	490	370	150	420
70-74	17,510	2,190	6,060	3,910	2,070	1,300	830	500	250	120	280
75-79	12,450	1,720	4,250	3,080	1,350	900	500	160	140	90	260
80-84	6,150	830	2,100	1,410	790	290	310	130	80	20	190
85 and over	2,510	480	970	570	140	130	50	50	30	10	80

Females

		Percentage all assessment								
	Total all ages	*10*[1]	*20*[1]	*30*	*40*	*50*	*60*	*70*	*80*	*90*	*100*
All ages	22,740	2,000	11,460	5,040	1,890	1,120	650	280	120	50	130
Under 18	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
18-19	30	—	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
20-24	260	—	190	50	10	—	10	—	—	—	—
25-29	450	—	370	30	20	10	20	—	—	—	—
30-34	580	30	330	150	40	20	10	—	—	—	—
35-39	980	30	560	170	110	50	60	—	—	—	—
40-44	1,610	80	970	340	90	50	50	10	—	10	10
45-49	2,150	120	1,150	420	200	130	60	30	10	—	30
50-54	2,610	140	1,510	540	140	140	80	40	10	10	—
55-59	3,100	200	1,750	680	200	170	40	30	20	—	10
60-64	2,920	390	1,360	540	260	180	110	20	40	—	20
65-69	2,580	330	1,140	630	270	70	40	50	20	10	20

	Total all ages	Percentage all assessment 10[1]	20[1]	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
70-74	1,860	280	640	600	130	70	80	40	—	—	20
75-79	1,670	190	700	450	160	90	40	10	10	10	10
80-84	1,250	100	550	310	160	60	20	40	—	—	10
85 and over	690	110	210	130	100	80	30	10	10	10	—

[1] 10,200 beneficiaries with disablements of between one and nineteen per cent. receive disablement pensions. Those of 1-13 per cent. are included at 10 per cent. and those of 14-19 per cent. are included at 20 per cent.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will indicate for the last year for which figures are available, how much was collected in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Scotland in respect of (i) income tax, showing PAYE separately, (ii) national insurance, (iii) value added tax, (iv) capital gains tax, (v) capital transfer tax, (vi) stamp duty on conveyancing, (vii) other stamp duty, (viii) inheritance tax, (ix) road tax on private vehicles and commercial vehicles separately, (x) duty on alcohol, (xi) duty on tobacco, (xii) duty on petrol and (xiii) duty on purchase of new vehicles.

Mr. Maude:

(i) No information is available on total income tax or PAYE collected in Northern Ireland and Scotland, but total income tax liabilities in 1987-88, the latest available year, were estimated to be £3·4 billion for taxpayers resident in Scotland and £0·8 billion for Northern Ireland residents.

(ii) National insurance receipts from Northern Ireland were £574 million in 1989-90. No figures are available for Scotland.

(iv) No information available for Northern Ireland and Scotland.

(v) and

(viii) Provisional estimates of receipts of estate duty, capital transfer tax and inheritance tax in 1990-91 are £74 million for Scotland and £18 million for Northern Ireland.

(vi) Stamp duty on conveyancing received by the Edinburgh Stamp Office in 1990-91 was £62 million and the corresponding amount for the Belfast Stamp Office was £8 million.

(vii) No information available for Northern Ireland and Scotland.

(ix) Estimates for Vehicle Excise Duty revenue in 1989-90 are as follows:

	Scotland £ million	Northern Ireland £ million
Total	230	65
Private, light goods vehicles and motorcycles	175	50
Others	55	15

Note: Figures are rounded to nearest £5 million.

Information on the tax collected in Northern Ireland and Scotland in respect of value added tax, car duty on alcohol, tobacco and petrol could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information would not reflect the tax falling on final expenditure in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

VAT (Hospices)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of the recent increase in value added tax on hospices with charity status.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that detailed information of this sort is not readily available.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on value added tax rating release for hospices with charity status.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There is a wide range of VAT reliefs designed to assist charities such as hospices with their caring work.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any proposals to reduce the burden of value added tax falling on caring charities such as hospices.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No. Charities, including hospices, already benefit from a wide range of VAT reliefs, as well as direct tax reliefs.

Income Levels

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to April 1991 the information on net earnings provided in the answer to the then hon. Member for Fulham of 10 February 1987, *Official Report*, columns *177-78*.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of the levels of earnings for the top 5 per cent. of earners are not published. The information in the table is based on estimates of these levels derived from distributions of earnings published in the relevant new earnings surveys. Information for April 1991 is not yet available. Earnings levels are for men or women as appropriate paid at adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowance.

Earnings after Income Tax, National Insurance Contributions[1] and Child Benefit (£ per week)

	April 1979[4]	April 1990
Single man		
At current prices	114·17	403·75
At constant April 1990 prices[2]	263·03	403·75
Married man[3]		
At current prices	117·98	416·98
At constant April 1990 prices[2]	271·81	416·98
Married man[3] with two children under 11		
At current prices	125·98	431·48
At constant April 1990 prices[2]	290·24	431·48
Single woman		
At current prices	72·23	262·92
At constant April 1990 prices[2]	166·41	262·92

[1] At the contracted in rate.
[2] By reference to the retail price index.
[3] Assuming no wife's earnings.
[4] Under the April 1979 tax/benefit regime.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: During 1991 the Chancellor is scheduled to appoint or reappoint five members of the National Economic Development Council and a further 15 during 1992. Appointments are for two years and no salary is paid.

In February the Queen, on the recommendation of the Chancellor, appointed five members to the Royal Mint Advisory Committee and during 1992 the Chancellor is scheduled to recommend up to four more appointments. Appointments are for seven years and no salary is paid.

Central Unit on Purchasing

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of savings achieved by the central unit on purchasing in each year since 1986.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The central unit on purchasing is an advisory unit responsible for encouraging best procurement practice in central Government Departments. It, therefore, has no executive purchasing responsibilities. However, since the formation of CUP and the start of the Government purchasing initiative in 1986, Departments collectively have achieved savings in excess of £1·3 billion. Detailed figures on departmental savings are set out in CUP's annual reports to the Prime Minister, copies of which are available in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the authorities which have a higher spending above standard spending assessment but have a lower council tax than Grimsby; and if he will set out the reasons for the difference in each case;

(2) further to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will list each district where most households are in band B in order of the district's divergence from the standard spending assessment, with the estimated council tax for band B in each district;

(3) further to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13*, if he will list each district in order of its percentage increase in spending above its standard spending assessment, showing its correlation with its position in rank order of level of council tax;

(4) if he will publish the correlation, and its statistical significance, between the level of council tax in band B for a two-person household in all districts with *(a)* the percentage spending of the district over or under standard spending assessment, *(b)* the band of the average value home in that district, *(c)* the percentage of homes in band A in that district and *(d)* the level of unemployment in each district according to the latest available figures.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 April 1991 to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) at column *12*.

Property Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing nationally and by regions the average and quintile amounts in income per head and property values together with the percentage deviation in each region from the national average.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

House Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing (i) the outturn of average dwelling prices for 1989 and (ii) for Greater London, Yorkshire and Humberside, the estimated average national capital value for the proposed council tax for all dwellings, all council dwellings and all dwellings less council dwellings; and if he will provide an estimate of the percentage in each of the proposed tax bands in each case.

Mr. Key: The illustrative council tax bills published on 23 April were based on an average property value of about £80,000. Estimates on the same basis of average property values in 1989 are not available. Nor are estimates which distinguish between council and other dwellings.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the individual appointments excluding casual vacancies he is scheduled to make to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992, indicating in each case the title of the post, the salary if any and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Heseltine: Information about the number and levels of remuneration of people appointed to public bodies by my Department is given in "Public Bodies 1990" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each region, county and district the number of dwellings and the average rateable value of dwellings within each quintile ranked by rateable value, together with the corresponding capital value; and if he will add in each case the gross revenue yield from rates in 1989-90 and the corresponding yield from the proposed council tax.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what is the ratio of average freehold and leasehold dwelling prices in each English region, Scotland and Wales to the English average used in his calculations in the illustrative tables for the council tax compared to 1982, 1977 and 1967; and what were the corresponding ratios for average incomes/earnings.

Mr. Key: Information on house prices for 1982, 1977 and 1967 is not available on a basis comparable with that

used in the tables showing illustrative council tax bills. Information on average earnings by regions is published by the Department of Employment in its annual reports of the new earnings survey.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what allowance is made in the standard spending assessment for numbers in private rented accommodation; and how this affects allocations per head of the population in *(a)* Grimsby, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Harrogate and *(d)* Eastbourne.

Mr. Key: The proportion of persons aged 65 years and over living in privately rented accommodation is used within the calculation of the standard spending assessment element for social services for the elderly. Details are given in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) which is in the Library.

The SSAs for Grimsby, Harrogate and Eastbourne are therefore unaffected by this factor since they are not social services authorities. Westminster receives around £14 per head of population in its SSA for 1991-92 as a result of this factor.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what allowance is taken in the standard spending assessment for Humberside of the need to raise the numbers of young people staying in education after 16 years.

Mr. Key: The post-16 education standard spending assessment is based on a measure of the number of students aged 16 years and over derived from the latest available counts. Any increase in the numbers of young people in Humberside staying in education beyond the age of 16 will, therefore, be directly reflected in that authority's assessment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what allowance is made in the standard spending assessment for tourism; and what is the rate per head of population for *(a)* Grimsby, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Scarborough and *(d)* Oxford.

Mr. Key: An allowance for tourism based on domestic overnight visitors is made in the standard spending assessment element for all other services. Details are given in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) which is in the Library. The amount of SSA per head of population for 1991-92 allocated on the basis of the tourism factor for each of the listed authorities is as follows: Grimsby £1 per head; Westminster £10 per head; Scarborough £10 per head; and Oxford £1 per head.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for Barrow-in-Furness, Great Grimsby, Westminster, Wandsworth and Elmbridge, the amount per household allowed under the various headings of the standard spending assessment together with the reasons for any difference.

Mr. Key: Details of the 1991-92 standard spending assessments, for all authorities, disaggregated by the main service elements, are given in the "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook 1991-92" which was placed in the Library on 24 April 1991. Figures are shown in pound million and pounds per adult. SSAs are calculated on the basis of general principles applied in the same way to all authorities as described in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) and the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) both of which are also in the Library. Any differences in SSAs between authorities, therefore, reflect their varying characteristics.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what allowance is made in the standard spending assessment for ethnic minorities; and how this affects allocations in *(a)* Grimsby, *(b)* Leeds, *(c)* Birmingham and *(d)* Wandsworth.

Mr. Key: The country of origin of household members is included in the additional needs indicator which is part of the education standard spending assessment; in the children's social index which is part of the personal social services and all other services SSA. Details are given in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) as amended by the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report, copies of which are in the Library.

The amounts allocated on the basis of each of these indices are shown for all authorities in the "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook 1991/92" which is also in the Library.

Council Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each of the seven bands of council tax (i) the average value of the dwellings together with his estimate of (ii) the rateable value and (iii) the average rate required to raise £6·8 billion and (iv) the rate yield in each case as against the tax yield from his proposal.

Mr. Key: Since the bands we propose for the council tax be the same in each area, the average value in each band will be broadly the same in each area. If capital values were taxed directly, a tax rate of under 0·5 per pound of value would be sufficient to raise £6·8 billion in England. Estimates of the rateable value of properties in each of the seven council tax bands are not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *13* about the size of increase in council tax required for each percentage point of increase in spending; what is the level of spending above standard spending assessment for *(a)* Cleethorpes and *(b)* Grimsby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Cleethorpes borough council set its demand on the collection fund for 1991-92 at £7·7 million, which is 31·0 per cent. or £34 per adult above the standard spending assessment. Great Grimsby borough council set its demand on the collection fund for 1991-92 at £11·8 million, which is 30·9 per cent. or £42 per adult above the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the assumed yield in paragraph 5 of his illustrative tables for the council tax is gross or net of rebates; and what is the gross yield as a percentage of the capital value overall and by decile groups of properties in terms of value.

Mr. Key: The assumed yield is gross of rebates. The gross yield as a percentage of capital value overall is less than 0·5p in the pound.

Information by decile groups of properties in terms of value is not available.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what he estimates will be the effect of the reduced income from second homes as a result of the change from double standard charge to 50 per cent. council tax in the borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed; and whether this figure was taken into account in the published projection of council tax for the borough.

Mr. Key: As explained in the consultation paper "A New Tax for Local Government", we propose that grant be distributed so that authorities in each area can finance spending at a standard level by levying standard taxable amounts. This will allow for the incidence of homes which are no one's sole or main residence. The illustrative council tax bills published on 23 April made allowance for the incidence of properties presently subject to the standard community charge.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on how the percentage yield from the council tax in each of his seven tax bands compares with the rate of wealth tax on houses in Germany.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 7 May 1991]:* The proposed council tax and German wealth tax are not directly comparable systems of local taxation.

Humming Birds

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number of licences which were issued for the import of humming birds and other nectar feeding birds in 1988 and 1989, and the average number of birds covered by each licence;

(2) what advice he has received from the United Kingdom Scientific Authority on the convention on trade in endangered species concerning the importation of humming birds and other nectar feeding birds.

Mr. Trippier: The information requested is as follows:

	Licences issued[1]		*Birds per licence*	
	1988	*1989*	*1988*	*1989*
Humming birds (trochilidae)	51	32	22	30
Nectar feeding birds (nectariniidae)	206	372	26	31

[1] Not all licences issued are used.

Our scientific adviser, the joint nature conservation committee, is consulted on all applications to import these birds. It has advised my Department that a number of these species are extremely sensitive and difficult to keep in captivity, although there is no reason why they should not be kept by zoos or individuals with specialist knowledge.

Tenant Incentive Scheme (Lambeth)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been made available to Lambeth council for the tenant incentive scheme; and how much has been taken up.

Mr. Yeo: Lambeth borough council has been allocated £1 million for cash incentive grants to its tenants in 1991-92 under the Government's homelessness initiative. None of this funding has yet been taken up by the council.

Calderdale (Rating)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the comparable estimated bills for Calderdale under *(a)* the proposed council tax, *(b)* under the poll tax in 1991-92 and *(c)* on the assumption that rates had remained.

Mr. Key: Illustrative 1991-92 council tax bills were published on 23 April. I have no estimate of the comparable level of bills had rates remained.

Housing (Taxation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what unadjusted gross and net percentage rate of tax on the freehold or leasehold value of dwellings in England would be required to yield £6·8 billion of revenue for local government purposes; and if he will publish a table showing the rate of tax and yield nationally and regionally.

Mr. Key: The explanatory notes covering the illustrative council tax bills published on 23 April show that the 18·9 million homes in England had an estimated value of about £80,000. This implies a total value of £1,500 billion and a tax rate of under 0·5p per pound of value to raise £6·8 billion.

Houses (Demolition)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to introduce planning controls over the demolition of houses; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Yesterday we tabled amendments to the Planning and Compensation Bill which will enable the Government to bring the demolition of houses within planning control in England and Wales.

Until recently the Government believed that demolition did not usually constitute development and therefore did not fall within planning control. However, a recent High Court decision held that, in the particular circumstances of the case, the demolition of dwelling houses was development. That decision is subject to an appeal.

For buildings listed as of historical or architectural importance and buildings within conservation areas, demolition is already covered by other controls. Most other demolitions of houses are not contentious and do not justify additional planning controls. However the Government are aware of the concern that has been expressed in particular cases. For example, some potential developers have demolished perfectly sound houses before having the necessary planning permission to erect replacement buildings. Rather than leave a vacant site that may blight neighbouring properties, the local planning authority can feel pressured to grant planning permission for an out-of-character development for which planning permission should be refused.

A public consultation exercise last year showed that, although such "speculative" demolition was not widespread, its occurrence did sometimes cause serious

concern. In the light of responses to that consultation process, having reflected on the debates on the subject of demolition at various stages of the Planning and Compensation Bill and bearing in mind the recent High Court judgment, the Government have now concluded that the time is right to introduce selective controls on demolition.

The proposed amendments would extend the definition of development to include the demolition of all buildings. They would also incorporate a direction-making power, which would enable the Secretary of State to provide that the demolition of particular types of building is not development and would not therefore be subject to planning control. Since the problem which these amendments are designed to tackle relates in particular to dwelling houses, our intention is to use this power to exclude from control all demolitions except demolitions of dwelling houses.

Because most demolitions of dwelling houses would not justify the full application of the new controls, we propose using the Town and Country General Development Order 1988 to grant permitted development rights for the demolition of dwelling houses in most circumstances. This would mean that planning permission would not normally be required for such demolition.

However, if a local planning authority wished to prevent demolition in a particular case or in a vulnerable area, it could use its power to give a direction which would require the developer to seek planning permission before proceeding with demolition. Such a direction would require the confirmation of the Secretary of State if it is to remain effective for longer than six months.

By these measures we believe that it will be possible to control these undesirable cases of demolition without putting an undue burden either on developers or on local planning authorities.

Gloucester Grove Estate, Peckham

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make a decision on the estate action programme bid submitted by the London borough of Southwark in respect of funds to improve the Gloucester Grove estate in Peckham.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing announced in February that the Gloucester Grove estate scheme was among applications approved in principle for support under this year's estate action programme, and that the London borough of Southwark had been invited to work up detailed proposals. Final decisions on individual schemes are announced as soon as possible after full submissions have been made and considered.

Planning Applications

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce compulsory notification and publicity for all planning applications submitted to local authorities.

Mr. Yeo: At present, applicants for planning permission in Scotland are statutorily required to notify neighbours. In England and Wales, by contrast, publicity for most types of planning application is at the discretion of the local planning authority; advice about this is given in my Department's circular 22/88—Welsh Office 44/88.

In the past, the Government have resisted proposals, from hon. Members and elsewhere, that there should be compulsory neighbour notification arrangements in England and Wales. We have argued that the present largely discretionary arrangements are appropriate, given the wide variety of situations in which development proposals arise, and that a statutory requirement to notify neighbours would be a burden on local authorities and applicants.

It has recently come to light that in fact some 75 per cent. of local authorities in England now give some type of publicity to all planning applications. The wide use of computers in local authority planning departments makes this practice less onerous than it would once have been.

Accordingly, the Government have decided that all planning applications in England and Wales, and any subsequent non-trivial amendments to applications, should be given some publicity. We will give effect to this by amending the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988, when we have considered the outcome of a public consultation exercise about the methods for achieving this objective. For example, in particular situations site notices, media announcements and other public notice may be no less effective than neighbour notification. The Department will publish by the end of June a consultation paper inviting the views of a wide range of organisations, including local authority and consumer interests. We would then make an amendment to the general development order which could come into effect later this year.

There is already a statutory requirement that owners of land and tenants of agricultural holdings must be notified by applicants for planning permission of planning applications affecting their land. Clause 15 of the Planning and Compensation Bill provides for transferring to secondary legislation many of the detailed procedures which have to be followed. This will make it easier to streamline and reform those procedures. But the Government propose to retain in primary legislation a requirement that owners and agricultural tenants must be notified of planning applications affecting their land. We will table an amendment to the Bill to give effect to this commitment at Report stage.

Twin Tracking

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet reached any conclusions in the light of responses to the consultation letter "Planning and Compensation Bill: Twin-Tracking".

Sir George Young: The Department's consultation letter of 6 March proposed an amendment to clause 14 of the Planning and Compensation Bill to enable local planning authorities to decline to determine a planning application if an appeal was before the Secretary of State in respect of a similar application.

A total of 74 responses were received, of which 16 expressed support for the proposal on the grounds that twin-tracking wastes the resources of local planning authorities and the planning inspectorate and that it involves an element of "queue jumping" in that twin-tracking applicants submit appeals for tactical reasons rather than as a matter of last resort.

Fifty-six respondents were against or strongly against the proposal. Many contended that twin-tracking is often the only lever available to applicants to encourage local

authorities to process applications with reasonable promptness. They also argued that the proposal would reduce the scope for constructive negotiation, because developers would lodge appeals as early as possible rather than risking protracted—and possibly fruitless—discussions with local planning authorities.

We announced in another place that we would review the 75 per cent. fee concession at present enjoyed by duplicate planning applications. I confirm that we intend to consult on the proposal that this concession should be eliminated altogether when we amend the application fees regulations later this year.

The Government are reluctant to take any action which would reduce the pressure on local authorities to determine planning applications quickly. Although the speed with which applications are decided has improved slightly, there is still considerable room for improvement—only 52 per cent. of applications were decided within eight weeks in the third quarter of 1990, compared with the Government's target of 80 per cent.

We accept that appeals should be made as actions of last resort, but at present applicants need some means of ensuring reasonable handling times. Accordingly, the Government have decided not to proceed with the proposal described in the consultation letter.

Local Authority Employees

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employees of the City of London and City of London Corporation earn more than the salary level that would bring them within the scope of parts I and II of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and have not obtained exemption; and if he will list the designated posts in the City of London and City of London Corporation to which parts I and II apply.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 7 May 1991]*: My Department does not hold this information. I have asked the independent adjudicator to let the hon. Member have such relevant information as he can.

Political Candidates, North Devon

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will hold an investigation into the free issue to political candidates for non-official purposes of self-adhesive labels bearing the name, address and rent book number of residents in the North Devon district council area.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 7 May 1991]*: I understand that the local authority concerned has already held an inquiry and published the results.

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Hazards

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many control of industrial major hazards safety case reports remained uncompleted in each of the Health and Executive's area offices on 1 April; and within what time scale he anticipates the backlog will be cleared.

Mr. Forth: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of scientific/medical staff undertaking research and development work on *(a)* health-related topics and *(b)* safety-related topics in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Forth: The figures requested are as follows.

	Health	*Safety*
1988-89	87	136
1989-90	92	143
1990-91	94	139

The term "research and development work" has been interpreted widely, and the figures include all scientific/medical staff engaged on the main laboratory activities.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of *(a)* vacancies, *(b)* applications received, *(c)* those interviewed, *(d)* those offered a job and *(e)* those who accepted a job as a specialist inspector of health and safety in the latest recruitment round.

Mr. Forth: There were no specific number of vacancies for specialist inspectors of health and safety in the latest completed recruitment round which took place in August 1990. Seven hundred and forty-nine applications were received; 229 applicants were interviewed; 58 were offered a job; and 47 accepted a job.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of factory inspectors in each Health and Safety Executive area office with less than two years' experience in the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April.

Mr. Forth: The total number of factory inspectors in each Health and Safety Executive area office with less than two years' experience in the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April is 146. The number in each area office as follows:

Factory Inspectors Class II with less than two years in the Health and Safety Executive at 1 April 1991.

	Inspectors
Bristol	4
Basingstoke	10
East Grinstead	7
Barking	9
London South	6
Chelmsford	5
Luton	5
Northampton	9
Birmingham	7
Cardiff	11
Newcastle-under-Lyme	9
Nottingham	8
Sheffield	6
Leeds	4
Manchester	7
Bootle	7
Preston	9
Newcastle-on-Tyne	8
Edinburgh	8
Glasgow	7
Total	146

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number and grades of specialist staff currently employed in the offshore safety division and the number it is proposed to employ in 1992.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

Grade	*Staff in post*
Grade 7 and above	10
Petroleum Specialist I	1
Petroleum Specialist II	4
Petroleum Specialist III	7
Petroleum Specialist IV	24
Reservoir Evaluation Specialist II	1
Reservoir Evaluation Specialist III	2
Reservoir Evaluation Specialist IV	1
Principal Inspector of Mines	1
Superintending Specialist Inspector	1
Factories Inspector 1A	2
Principal Agricultural Inspector	1
TOTAL	55

Detailed staffing targets are not yet available.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for what reasons, and on which grades, the Health and Safety Executive imposed recruitment bans in 1990-91.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive did not impose recruitment bans for any grades in 1990-91.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unfilled professional/scientific posts existed at the Health and Safety Executive, Cricklewood laboratories as at 1 April.

Mr. Forth: There were 11 such posts unfilled at the Cricklewood laboratories on 1 April.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the Health and Safety Executive's scientific staff at the Cricklewood laboratories had less than two years' experience on 1 April.

Mr. Forth: There were 20 Cricklewood scientific staff with less than two years' experience on 1 April.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of staff at the Health and Safety Executive's Cricklewood laboratory on 1 April and how many there were on 1 April 1989.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive employed 87 staff at its Cricklewood laboratory on 1 April 1991. There were 91 staff at the same location on 1 April 1989.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many occupational hygienists are currently working specifically on gas safety at the Health and Safety Executive's Bootle headquarters; how many explosives inspectors are engaged on the same work; and how many staff days are allocated specifically to this work.

Mr. Forth: There is currently one occupational hygienist working specifically on gas safety at the Health and Safety Executive's Bootle headquarters; 60 staff days are allocated for this work. Explosives inspectors do not work on gas safety.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he intends to take to help relieve the Health and Safety Executive of the burden of inexperience mentioned by the Health and Safety Executive's director general in the 1989-90 annual report, caused by the high resignation rate of factory inspectors.

Mr. Forth: In meeting the Health and Safety Commission's public expenditure survey bids in full in recent years, the Government welcomed the Health and Safety Executive's intention to increase numbers of inspectors, including factory inspectors. The consequent increased recruitment effort by the HSE has led to increases in the numbers of inspectors since 1988 and, therefore, a larger number of inexperienced inspectors. As a result, the HSE is giving close attention to training arrangements for new recruits. The HSE's plans for further recruitment, training and retention are set out in the commission's plan of work for 1991-92 and beyond, to be published at the end of May.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what resource costs, both in terms of finance and staff years, were incurred by the Health and Safety Executive in the investigation of the *(a)* Cannon street, *(b)* Redbourne gas over-pressurisation, *(c)* Hillsborough, *(d)* Piper Alpha and *(e)* King's Cross accidents.

Mr. Forth: Comprehensive and precise information about the costs of the HSE's contributions to investigations of those accidents is not available. The estimates given relate to resource inputs from HSE's field operations and technology divisions and its research and laboratories division. They do not include the time of senior management or other associated work and are thus minimum estimates of technical resources directly applied. The HSE is not aware of any incident at Redbourne.

Identified investigation costs to the HSE are:

Cannon Street — not available: investigation ongoing
Hillsborough — approximately 6 staff years
Piper Alpha — approximately 1 staff year
Kings Cross — approximately 18 staff years.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of agricultural inspectors in each Health and Safety Executive area office with less than two years' experience in the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April.

Mr. Forth: The total number of agricultural inspectors in each Health and Safety Executive area office with less than two years' experience in the Health and Safety Executive on 1 April is 39. The number in each area office is as follows:

Assistant agricultural inspectors with less than two years in the Health and Safety Executive at 1 April 1991

	Assistant inspectors
Bristol	4
Basingstoke	1
East Grinstead	3
Chelmsford	3
Luton	3
Northampton	2
Cardiff	2
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3
Nottingham	2
Sheffield	1
Leeds	4
Bootle	2
Preston	2
Newcastle-on-Tyne	3

	Assistant inspectors
Edinburgh	3
Glasgow	1
TOTAL	39

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the maximum number of trainee factory and agricultural inspectors it is possible for the Health and Safety Executive to recruit and train effectively each year.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive estimates that it is possible to make arrangements for the effective training of a maximum of 90 newly recruited inspectors each year.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff years will be devoted in 1991 to preventive inspectors by the Health and Safety Executive's field operations divisions.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not available in the form requested. In the period 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992 the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division proposes to spend 383·9 staff years on planned preventive inspection.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of health and Safety Executive inspectors working on risk assessment of major hazards.

Mr. Forth: There are currently 18 Health and Safety Executive inspectors working on risk assessment of major hazards.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number of vacancies for specialist staff that exist in the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division; and how many applications were received to the most recent recruitment advertisement.

Mr. Forth: There is no specific number of vacancies for specialist staff in offshore safety division available at present, as the reorganisation and structure of the offshore safety division is still under consideration. A total of 530 applications were received for the current recruitment competition for petroleum specialists.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many safety cases he estimates the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division will be required to undertake in 1991-92; how many specialist staff will be engaged on this work; and at what grade.

Mr. Forth: Allowing for the necessary consultations, legislation requiring the submission of safety cases for offshore installations will not be made until 1992. Arrangements for assessing safety cases are currently being considered but it is too early to say how many staff will be engaged.

Industrial Accidents

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of safety reports, under regulation 7(i) of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1984, submitted to each Health and Safety Executive region before 8 July 1989 and the number of site occupiers who have still to receive a confirmatory letter from the Health and Safety Executive stating that the report has been examined, that selective inspections based on the report have been completed and that the report will now be used as a reference document in future inspections.

Mr. Forth: Information about the submission of safety reports under the Control of Industrial Major Hazards Regulations 1984—CIMAH—before 8 July 1989 is not available in the form requested and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However under CIMAH, operators at existing industrial activities covered by the regulations were required to submit safety reports to the HSE by 8 July 1989. The HSE received 331 such reports by August 1989. The table shows a breakdown by the HSE regions that now exist:

	Number
Wales and the South West	45
London and the South East	14
Home Counties	24
Midlands	21
Yorkshire and the North East	105
North West	57
Scotland	65

All reports must be examined on a multi-disciplinary basis by the HSE's field operations and technology divisions. A total of 325 reports have been examined and 86 of these have been categorised as entirely satisfying the requirement of schedule 6 of the CIMAH and have received a confirmatory letter.

Agricultural and Factory Inspectors

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory and agricultural inspectors have been recruited in each of the years 1978 to 1990.

Mr. Forth: The available figures are as follows:

Year	Factory inspectors	Agricultural inspectors
1985[1]	27	7
1986	44	20
1987	33	0
1988	44	12
1989	56	14
1990	56	16
TOTAL	260	69

[1] Centrally held recruitment figures are not available before 1985.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors 1B, with more than two years' experience in the grade, resigned in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and the first three months of 1991.

Mr. Forth: The number of factory inspectors 1B with more than two years' experience in the grade who resigned in the years in question are as follows:

	Number
1987	22
1988	14
1989	12
1990	13
[1]1991	5

[1] January to March.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 190**

SESSION 1990–91

29th April—10th May 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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